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THE DEMON OF THE FOREST

CHAPTER I

THE YOUNG ADVENTURERS

THE past autumn was one of great beauty up in the far Northwest. Warm weather prevailed longer than any previous season for a number of years, and consequently Nature was in her loveliest moods.

The prairies were growing dry and dun-hued, and the trees were beginning to rattle down their leaves as the result of the early frost, when we open our romance in a location as hitherto quite neglected by the pen of the novelist and veracious historian—*i.e.*, in the British possessions to the northwest of Minnesota. A land of singular beauty, with its vast rolling prairies, its level plains, its vast tracts of silent forest, its numerous clear streams and lakelets.

The day we have chosen for the opening of our romance was a calm sunny one in the early part of October.

Two boys in a boat were leisurely descending a stream which ran through a dense forest of hemlocks and pine, and which was both wide and deep, the waters flowing sluggishly.

As their boat, a light gaily-painted skiff, with two sets of oars, drifted along at will of the current, the two youths gazed around in awed silence, with an occasional glance at each other, in which were expressed wonder and anxiety.

The foremost youth, about eighteen years of age, was of a full, supple form, and fair, good-natured face, but was not handsome. His eyes were brown and sparkling, and his hair a half-shade lighter. He was attired in a handsome and serviceable hunting-suit, and equipped with a Winchester rifle, of the Centennial model, while his revolvers were fine weapons. Ammunition was carried in one of two leathern bags, which were strapped to his back.

His companion was evidently about a year older, and in form was something of a

curiosity. He towered aloft to the measure of six and a half feet, when standing in his boots, and was literally a living skeleton, as his skin was simply drawn over the bones, with not a pound of superfluous flesh in his make-up. His clothes sat loosely upon him, and his boots were the only thing that fitted him, and they were number fourteens. In face he was thin and pinched as in form, with a sallow complexion, and little greenish eyes that peered strangely from their sockets.

He was a remarkable contrast to strong, sturdy Hal Dayton, his companion, looking old enough to be his father. His name was Dave Laam, or as he was better known, Big Track; for it was declared that no man in the Northwest could fill his tracks, with a human foot.

What should bring these two contrasts together, and so far out in the Northwestern wilderness, can be readily explained in a few words.

Both were sons of wealthy merchants in Ottawa, Canada.

Being possessed of an adventurous spirit, their parents had equipped them, and sent them into the wilds, supposing, of course, that a couple of weeks would satisfy their desire for "roughing it," when they would then return gladly and settle down to business.

But neither Hal nor Big Track had any desire to return until they had seen all there was to see, and consequently we now behold them many hundred miles from their homes, in the wilds of a thinly settled tract of the British possessions.

For the last twenty-four hours, they had been following the course of the stream, in the hopes of emerging again into the settled district of Quinnebog, which they believed to lie south of them. But the forest was seemingly endless.

"By Jinks, I'm gettin' tired o' ridin' along this way," said Dave Laam, as he glanced at his elegant watch. "It's gettin' on

toward night again, and we ain't out of the woods by a long shot. My joints predict rheumatiz, unless we get out o' here."

After pulling on for another hour, steadily, they shipped their oars, as if by one impulse.

The trees had grown a trifle more open, and light came down from ahead.

But this was not what caused Hal Dayton to seize Big Track by the arm, and point to the eastern shore.

"Look! look!" he whispered, excitedly, "see there on the bank. Who in the name of Jupiter can it be?"

Big Track looked as directed, and beheld a white horse standing upon the bank in plain view—a noble, snowy stallion, handsomely caparisoned, and mounted by a young girl, and a white one at that, even though her attire was that of an Indian princess.

She was young—less than Hal's own age, with a graceful, willowy form, and a round, pretty face, glowing brightly with health.

Her costume was gay, yet modest, and richly spangled with Indian beadwork and gold and silver ornaments, solid bands of gold encircling her wrists.

A rifle of Ballard's fine make lay in front of her, across the saddle. Altogether she made up a strange picture to view in the heart of a far northwestern forest.

"Who is it?" Happy Hal asked, excitedly. "Jove! she's a reg'lar beauty."

"She looks like an Indian queen or princess," Big Track replied, in a low tone.

The girl equestrian still maintained her position on the bank, and watched the drifting canoe containing Hal and Dave.

"I propose we pull toward her, and have an interview. She's white, clean out and out, and probably she can speak United States," said Dave.

Accordingly they pulled toward the bank, and she did not change her position, nor did her horse stir.

When they were a few feet from the bank, Happy Hal arose to his feet, doffed his hat and bowed low.

In reply, a low, musical laugh came back that caused gallant Hal to redden.

The strange equestrienne was looking at him curiously.

"The young pale-face does honour to Hazel Eye, the Lily of the Forest," she said.

"Why is it so?"

"We are surprised at finding a young lady in these desolate surroundings, and thought we'd ask about you," Hal managed to stammer, for the steady, unflinching gaze of the forest princess had literally abashed his self-possession.

"The pale-face is inquisitive, but is not the first one of the same characteristics,"

was the reply. "To one and all, Hazel Eye has no word of explanation."

"Oh! just as you please about that. But aren't you afraid to be alone in the forest, unprotected?"

"No! Hazel Eye knows not fear in the forest alone, for it is her home—her hunting-grounds. She heard of the pale-faces' coming, and she came hither to warn them that they are surrounded by dangers. To retreat means death; to advance is perilous."

"Phew! you don't say so," and Hal gave vent to a whistle. "Who's going to hurt us—a couple innocent babes in the timber?"

"The young pale-faces have many enemies unknown to them. The great chief, Sitting Bull, is now monarch of these forests, and his warriors count many. He has learned of the two young pale-faces, and wants their scalps."

"Sitting Bull is a mighty warrior," the girl continued, "and he counts his conquests by the hundreds. He is a bitter foe to the white race; he hates them as the snake hates fire. They drove him from his hunting-grounds, and he came hither; and he has sworn to kill every pale-face who invades these hunting-grounds, which he claims as his own."

"But, is there not a settlement below here, somewhere?"

"Yes; the pale-faces' settlement of Quinnebog, or the Choppings, lies not far below. And it is there the young pale-faces are bound?"

"Exactly. And why does he not war upon these settlers of the Choppings?"

"Because they number many sturdy woodsmen and their families, and are strong. Besides, they were here before Sitting Bull came, and are not at war with him and his braves."

"How many braves has he?"

"Many; but all are not Sioux. Some are renegades with painted faces, some are of other tribes."

"You seem to know all about it, young lady," observed Big Track; "you must belong to old Sitting Bull's caravan."

"Hazel Eye is a child of the forest. She has none to stay her; she comes and goes at pleasure; she belongs to no one."

"But, see here, there is no Injun about you?"

"No Indian blood flows in the veins of the Forest Lily," was the reply.

"Then you are a friend to the whites, I take it. Give us your advice what we'd best do."

"Hazel Eye has no advice to give the pale-face youths. They come from a great distance into the wilderness where there are

many perils. They are armed, and are young and strong. Hazel Eye has only to warn them of the warriors of Sitting Bull and of Canada Chet, of Beaver Lake."

"Who is Canada Chet?"

"The great Canadian trapper, who takes many skins each year. He, too, knows of the coming of the pale-face youths, and swears to drown them if he catches them near the great village of the Beaver."

"Well, let him drown. We've heard big stories about this Beaver Lake, and we're the very lads who are going to see it and trap there!" Hal cried, independently.

"The words of the pale-face are very brave, but Canada Chet is a powerful enemy."

"Pshaw! ye don't know us! We can lick half-a-dozen Canadians in a fair fight. S'pose we'd best slope for Quinnebog, eh?"

"The pale-faces must guide their own actions, Hazel Eye has spoken," and with these words, she turned and rode back into the forest.

Hal then turned to his companion.

"Well, Fatty, what's to be done? It looks kind as if it would be healthier for us in Ottawa about this time, don't it, than in this howling wilderness, eh?"

"No. We've just arrived at the Mecca of our desires, where we can get our fill of adventure and—*Indians!*"

He pointed as he spoke into the wood on the western side of the stream; then suddenly slid flat into the bottom of the skiff, pulling Hal unceremoniously after him.

Not a moment too soon.

The next instant several rifles cracked, bullets whizzed close over the sides of the boat, and the reports echoed and re-echoed through the great silent aisles of the forest.

CHAPTER II

FUGITIVES STILL

THE rifle-shots were accompanied by wild yells, and carefully peering over the side of the boat, Big Track beheld the western shore swarming with painted red-skins, who were about descending into the water.

"The varmints are goin' to swim out fer us," he said to Happy Hal, who was crouching flat in the bottom of the canoe. "We're in a confounded fix and no mistake."

"Hark! what does this mean? The sound of horse's footfalls upon the left shore. Can Hazel Eye have returned?"

"I'll be hanged if she hasn't!" Dave

replied, joyfully. "Hark! she is addressing the Injuns."

It was even so. The Forest Lily had returned and her voice rang out across the water, her words directed to the red-skins, who had suddenly ceased their yelling as she appeared upon the eastern bank.

"Stop! what means this outrage? Have not the warriors of Sitting Bull had enough of warfare for one day, when their hands have become stained thrice over with human blood, and another fair slave has been added to their chief's lodge? Away! away! I say, and war not against the young pale-faces. Hazel Eye has spoken."

"The words of Forest Lily are of great wisdom," said a stalwart young buck, who was clad in the uniform of an under chief, "but Mink Cap is a chief nearly as great as the great Sitting Bull, under whom he serves, and he cannot bow at the words of the Forest Lily."

"Then may the Demon of the Forest invoke his wrath upon you!" the girl cried, sharply.

At this the red-skins seemed to shrink in terror, as if some poisonous reptile had been dropped in their midst. They shook their heads with guttural exclamations.

"The words of the Forest Lily are stern and rebuking. What would she have Mink Cap and his warriors do?" the chief demanded, from across the stream.

"Hazel Eye would have Mink Cap and his warriors give up this warfare against the two pale-faces, and return to their village," was the reply. "If they disobey the Forest Lily she will surely invoke the wrath of the Woods Demon upon them."

"Then it shall be as the Girl Ranger wills," Mink Cap replied. "The warriors of Sitting Bull shall return to their lodges, and suffer the pale-face dogs to escape."

The young chief spoke to his men, and all withdrew into the edge of the forest, where they saluted the girl rider, upon the opposite shore, and then disappeared into the depths of the timber.

Hazel Eye watched them keenly until they had disappeared; then she turned her eyes upon Hal and Dave Laam, who had resumed their seats in the skiff.

"The pale-faces are at liberty to go now, and had best make the most of the opportunity," she said, waving her fair hand down the river. "The red-man is as treacherous as the tarantula of the South, and the young pale-faces have not seen the last of them. Let them go."

"You bet your life we will, Miss Hazel Eye!" Happy Hal assured. "We haven't got much time to thank ye now, but we'll make up for it, some other time."

Seizing the oars, both laid to with a will, and the skiff shot along out into the deep silent stream like an arrow.

Over the waters they glided, swiftly keeping a lookout on either side for redskins.

They kept on until it was about the hour of sunset, when they suddenly found the river merged into a lakelet of several miles in width—a glassy sheet of water, whose banks were locked with dense forests of pine.

To the northern side of the lake, a score of cabins were visible in among the trees, and a cloud of steam and smoke arising from a large shanty proclaimed it to be a saw-mill.

Near the centre of the lake a tiny shoal of land arose from the water, and upon it, and all around it, were those compositions of mud sticks and stone, known to the trapper as "beaver huts." Several hundred of these strange *habitans* poked their heads out of the water, making a strange and picturesque scene—an animal congregation.

"By Jove! we are in Beaver Lake," Hal exclaimed as he gazed over the scene upon which the dying sunlight cast a halo. "According to Hazel Eye we've got right out o' ther fryin'-pan, into the fire."

"Hang the luck, yes," Big Track replied, with a growl. "Yet this is the place we were originally steering for, and there is no use backing out, yet awhile. The first question we have before us, is—what shall we do?"

"Do? Why get back to shore, as lively as possible and scull along under cover of the wood, until we can find a good place to spend the night. I propose we go ashore, and tramp into the settlement, yonder. There ought to be some kind of protection there, anyhow?"

"This was decided as the best course to pursue, and pulling in to the nearest shore, they disembarked, and secreted their boat in a clump of bushes that fringed the bank.

Then, shouldering their rifles, they followed the curving of the lake shore, until they reached the settlement, which consisted of some thirty cabins, all built in under the shelter of the forest.

It was evidently a town for the purpose of producing lumber from the immense forests that stretched away in all directions.

There were no streets laid out, nor any fences, but every man evidently had built his cabin where it pleased him.

One or two shanties of sawed lumber were there, also, and over the door of one of these was a creaking sign, bearing the words:

"CHOPPINGS HOTEL."

There was also a grocery store and a blacksmith shop, besides the steam saw-mill, which was running at full blast.

"Let's go in here and see how things savour," Hal said, and they accordingly entered the "Choppings Hotel."

It was a rough, ill-constructed apartment which they entered, with uneven floor and unplastered walls, and everything wearing a dingy appearance at that.

A rude bar, behind which was a cracked mirror; a rusty stove around which lay numerous quids of tobacco, and several tables and rough stools, comprised the furniture, unless we mention the individual behind the bar.

He was a rawboned, repulsive-looking wretch, with his sleeves rolled to his elbow, and his shirt open at the hairy throat—a man with bloated face, bloodshot eyes, and matted hair and beard, so ugly as to cause one to shudder to look at him.

He was smoking a grimy pipe, which he condescended to remove in order to stare insolently at the new-comers.

Hal stepped up to the bar independently, and motioned for Big Track to follow his example.

"Come, old covey, dish us out some good cigars," he said, reaching in his pockets for money. "Give us the best you've got, now."

"Hain't got none," was the gruff reply.

"Got anything to eat?"

"You bet!"

"Well, let's have your bill of fare."

"Hain't got none."

"Good Heavens! what have you got then?" Hal demanded, half-exasperated.

"Got turkey buzzard an' swill."

"What do you take us for, anyhow?" put in Dave Laam. "We don't want buzzard."

"Nor swill—we ain't hogs," assured Hal, gazing around in despair. "What else have you got? Haven't you got any bread, meat, or cheese, or milk, or——"

"Got swill," was the only answer.

"Well, what in the name of Jupiter Pluvius is swill, then?"

"Swill is milk," deigned to answer the host, loftily.

"Well, then, trot us out several quarts, and let us sample it," Dave ordered, overjoyed at the prospect of appeasing the cravings of his voracious appetite.

The man shuffled off, and was gone about an hour, during which time our young voyageurs had to amuse themselves as best they could.

"What has become of the chap?" Dave demanded at last. "Ten to one he's fallen asleep, while on his errand."

"No, here he comes at last," Hal replied; and sure enough, the proprietor of the hotel entered, carrying two ten-quart pails brimming full of fresh, foaming milk, which he deposited upon the bar with a huge grunt.

"Give's yer money," he ordered, relighting the grimy pipe.

"You be blowed!" growled Dave.

"Where are our drinks of milk?"

"I'll allow thar's two on 'em on the counter. W'at more d'ye want?" the host said gruffly.

"You don't call the bucketfuls *drinks*, do ye?" Dave gasped.

The voyageurs didn't wait long to bandy words, but slapping two dollars down upon the counter, then set to work at their novel drink. Each bucket was provided with a lip for straining and pouring purposes, and gluing their own lips to this, each youth began to drink. And they drank and swallowed, and swallowed and drank, until they could hold no more, when they relinquished the nozzles, and compared notes.

Hal had emptied his about a quarter of the way, while Dave had accomplished a good half!

Suddenly loud voices were heard coming through the woods in the vicinity of the tavern.

The host vaulted over the bar, and peeped out of the door rather nervously. When he came back he looked so grim that Hal and Dave involuntarily exchanged glances.

"See hyar, young fellers," he said, stopping in front of them. "I opine you've struck an unhealthy latitude. My name's a legion uv honer in this yere town, but I'm an old sinner ef Capt'in Canada Chet an' his gaing o' cusses ain't p'intin' fer this werry shanty."

"Well, what of it?" Hal Dayton demanded. "What've they got to do with us?"

"Waal, now, ye don't want ter let 'em git hold on ye, ef ye hev'n't a likin' fer a bit o' hemp, Piccadilly collar style, an' an elevated limb."

"You mean they'd lynch us?"

"Waal, I opine they would. Leastwise, ef ye couldn't lick twenty on 'em, thet would be yer fate. Ye see as how Canada Chet purty much runs this hyar town, an' he don't allow no immigration, you bet! He sez he's got them picked out as he wants, and none others will he have. Now, providin' ye want escape him, how much'll ye pan out ef I hide ye till he gits gone?"

"How much'll you take?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Give you ten—that's every cent."

"Agreed. Hurry up,—they're 'most heer."

Harry Dayton handed him a crisp United States X., and then he led them behind the bar, where there were several barrels.

Taking some keys from his pocket, he unlocked the heads of two ordinary-looking barrels, and raised them on invisible hinges.

"Git in lively," he growled, "and keep yer nozzles ter ther bung-hole, or ye'll smother."

"Then will you let us out when danger is blown over?"

"Yes, yes—get in."

Both Hal and Phil obeyed, and soon were locked within their queer places of refuge.

And not a moment too soon; for the door was flung open, and a swarm of stogy-booted, long-bearded and roughly-clad men burst into the room, and they heard a hoarse voice cry:

"Here we aire, boys; but rippin blazes! where's the kids? Say, you Abe Hooker, whar's them strangers?"

CHAPTER III

SITTING BULL

"CRACK!"

The echo of a rifle report went booming through the wild woodland, answered in the distance by a death-yell. The time was night, and all nature seemed at rest, for a brooding silence hung over the woods, the waters and the prairie, which stretched away in a vast unbroken expanse, a few miles north of Beaver Lake, beyond the timber.

A man, who had been crouching in the edge of the timber, arose to his feet, and wiped the barrel of his repeating rifle with a rag.

"Another red hellion gone ter blazes, kerslap," he chuckled. "That makes fifteen to-day, which ain't a werry bad average, I'll allow, fer a pilgrim o' my status. Fifteen, Old Sitting Bull, an' yet I ken't git a bead on ye. Waal, thar's better times a-coming; an' ef thet ancient an' remote leetle Darwinian, Old Anaconda, ken't get at ye, ther hull United States Con-stitoochin hes gone ter slivers, an' no mistake. Ef evyer ther war a beast, bird or reptyle I hate, et be an Injun."

The old fellow said this fiercely enough as if in dead earnest.

He was something of a curiosity to behold, this little old scout, such as you would not often stumble across very often in the Far West.

He was a dwarf, not over four feet four, in height, with strong, perfectly shaped

limbs, large, irony muscles, and a trunk of prodigious strength. In every way he was a perfect specimen of well-ripened manhood, except in height, in which he was lacking. His face was covered nearly to the eyes with hair which the shears had reduced to a harsh stubble, so that his glittering little orbs were all that lent his face any expression.

He was clad in a well-worn suit of buckskin, with a beaver-skin cap upon his head, and belt around his waist containing a curious assortment of revolvers, knives, scalps, ammunition, etc. His rifle was a Winchester repeater of the 1876 model, and handsomely mounted with silver, and a diamond muzzle sight.

He slung this weapon to his back now, and stood for a moment gazing out over the prairie, upon which the moon shed so grand a flood of light. Away to the north-east galloped a horse—the riderless animal of the Indian the scout had dropped from his saddle.

A smothered sigh escaped the little old man's lips, and he turned and glanced around him.

"Thar's danger afoot to-night fer somebody," he muttered. "I ken feel it in my bones. I'll sail out an' see ter thet war-mint's top-knot, an' then I'll take a scout toward old Sitting Bull's camp. Ten ter one I'll drop another before I soar back."

He accordingly threw himself in the grass, and crawled out upon the prairie.

Stealthily he crawled along until he came to the spot where the savage lay stretched out upon the prairie, stark and silent, a horrible distortion of his features evidencing the fact that he had died hard.

As he gazed upon the savage, Old Anaconda gave a little start of surprise.

"It is. Flying Eagle, Sitting Bull's best herald," he said. "I thort et wasn't no common Injun a-runnin' around loose in this fashion. I'll bet he's carryin' sum news ter Mary, an' may I be stewed fer pie ef I don't find out about sum leetle game!"

With very little compunction the dwarf scout "raised" the Indian's scalp, after which he proceeded to make an examination of his personal effects.

But he failed to find anything that he wanted, and he sat for a few moments in silent thought.

"Queer, durn my Doxy Ann ef it ain't!" he muttered, at last. "I calculate thet Injun war ther transporter o' news, an' he had it on paper, too, probably. But what has become of it?"

More cogitation suddenly brought to him a thought—one that was hardly feasible, sure enough, but still an idea worthy of

testing. Might not the crafty savage have put the paper in his mouth?

"Bet a jug o' p'izen I've struck ther head on the nail first pop," he chuckled, drawing a knife, preparatory to prying open the set jaws.

Having succeeded in prying open the dead savage's jaws, and inserting one finger, he felt about for the message. Surely enough, his "feeler" came in contact with a lump of pulp, or paper, which he drew out with a chuckle of triumph.

It was a piece of paper, upon which was writing, all wadded up tightly into a little ball.

With considerable eagerness the scout unravelled it and spread it out. The moonlight which poured down from overhead afforded him a chance to read it, word for word.

It ran as follows:

"To His Chieftaincy, Sitting Bull:—"

"Everything is working as well as you could wish. With my men I have surrounded the old trapper's cabin, and shall burn him out before morning unless he yields. At any rate, the girl, Milly Owen, shall be in the lodge of the great and noble chief, Sitting Bull, ere another moon rise.

"SAGOBOSKI, Assistant Chief."

Such was the main disclosure, with the following postscript:

"Beware of the scout, Old Anaconda, or the Dwarf Destroyer. He is abroad again, upon your trail, with the persistency of a bloodhound."

The old man coughed as he read this notice.

"They purty near hit ther mark, I'll allow," he muttered.

Riding through the forest went the girl Hazel Eye, or the Forest Lily, as she was called by the Indians.

In the course of an hour, by taking a circuitous route, she came out upon the bank of Beaver Lake, directly opposite the Choppings.

Here stood a large log cabin, with several windows up under the eaves, and a heavily-ironed oaken door, which was closed.

Dismounting, the girl scout slipped the bits from the mouth of her horse so that he might graze upon the luxuriant herbage which grew upon the bank. She then approached the cabin door, and gave several taps upon it with her knuckles.

It was presently opened by an old man, with flowing beard as white as snow, and hair to match—a pinched-faced, withered man of some five and sixty years, clad in a

flowing cloak-like robe of black such as might have answered the purpose of a monk.

"Is that thee, child? Why didst thou not return sooner?" this individual demanded, as he admitted the girl into a large dimly-lighted room, and took care to close and bar the door again.

"Why did I not return sooner?" Hazel Eye replied, dropping upon a couch of skins, with a sigh. "Because, grandpa, Meteor could not bring me faster."

"Knowest thou the doings of the devil in this section then?" the old man asked, going to a fire that burned upon an elevated hearth, and stirring a pot of boiling substance, which emitted a strange perfume.

"Ay, I know much more than I care to," the girl replied, wearily. "The warriors of Sitting Bull are on the war-path against such strangers as venture into this country, while Canada Chet is only second in fierceness and cruel brutality to the chief."

"Knowest thou if the Sioux chief and the Canadian are on terms of treaty?"

"No. I do not know anything about it. I should say not, though."

"I have been studying hard to-day, in magic," the old man muttered, seating himself upon a stool and gazing abstractedly into the fire. "I have found and solved many new points. I have worked wonders out of nothing, and now let them come!—let them come, I say, and I shall be ready for them!"

"Fear not, grandpa, for no enemies will ever molest us here in this solitude."

"Thou hast not the judgment of my older years, child. I know that they will come—that they are even now upon the way."

"It is only your constant fear of them that drives you into the belief," the girl replied, removing her belt of weapons, and surveying herself in a cracked mirror that hung against the wall. "Surely, you are out of their reach, as who would ever think of looking for us here?"

"The devil could easily find us, and Caspar Dayton would not be alive if he were not leagued with the devil, curse him!"

"Why should you fear him, then?" Hazel Eye said, with a laugh. "Every one declares you an imp of His Satanic Majesty."

The old man chuckled, then remained silent for some time; but he spoke again, at last:

"Sitting Bull was here an hour before you arrived."

"Sitting Bull!" the girl echoed, her eyes dilating wildly. "What brought him—here?"

"That you might easily guess. He has seen the grandchild of the Man of Magic, and fallen in love with her. He wishes to add her to the collection of wives already in his wigwam, and offers many hides and horses."

"And what did you tell him?" the beauty of the wilderness demanded, quickly.

"I told him that the Forest Lily was her own guide—that he must present his petition to you, in person."

"Why did you do this, grandpa? You could have easily spared me the trouble of a meeting with the savage monster, had you chosen!"

"I did for the best, child. We are two wanderers upon the face of the earth, with no one to look to for protection. Therefore, I would not call upon us the enmity of the great warrior of the Sioux."

"Then, do I understand you that you would permit me to become one of the slaves of that cruel wolf?"

"Nay—I would have nothing of the kind. I would have you stay ever with me. But this chief must have his conqueror, and you shall be his conqueror. But, ask me not the whys and wherefores, now, for this brain of mine is full of magic—full of mystery."

Hazel Eye made no reply.

She was used to the eccentricities of this old magician of the North—used to all his mode of living, his temper, his studies and his ravings.

She had lived with him ever since she could remember—alone with him, having no companionship except his, his books and her horse. He had educated her in all that was desirable, but taught her to make no friends.

She left him now, sitting over his fire, and went out into the wood at the edge of the lake.

Night had fallen, and although the moon was rising in the east, it was comparatively dark in the timber and upon the lake.

Standing upon the shore, she gazed across the silent sheet of water toward the Choppings, where several lights twinkled dimly.

"I wonder if the young strangers arrived safely over there?" she murmured. "I am afraid danger has befallen them for they are so unused to this life. I wonder what brought them into this wild, unsettled country?"

She stood thus pondering over the events of the day, when she was suddenly aroused by a hand being laid upon her shoulder, and glancing hastily up she saw a painted Indian standing close beside her.

She shuddered, for she recognized him as Sitting Bull.

CHAPTER IV

SITTING BULL'S THREAT

THAT Hazel Eye was startled and alarmed was not strange. Since the coming into the British possessions of the noted Indian chief, she had entertained for him a loathing that surpassed her fear for his merciless savage tools.

"The Forest Flower need not be alarmed!" he said in a deep, hoarse tone. "Why should she fear the great chief of the Sioux?"

"Why should I not fear the great chief?" Hazel Eye demanded, shrinking away a pace. "Why should not the Forest Lily fear the chief? The murderer of General Custer is no friend of Hazel Eye—never can be!"

"The pale-face maiden mistakes: Sitting Bull did not kill George Custer, even though Sitting Bull has tallied many conquests. It was one of Sitting Bull's warriors who killed the blonde general of the pale-faces; but the blame was laid upon me."

"You have a very plausible tongue, chief, but it cannot deceive the Lily of the Forest," Hazel Eye replied, fearlessly. "What would Sitting Bull, here, at the home of the Magician of the North—the home of evil spirits and strange transactions?"

A proud, disdainful smile lit up the hideous features of the chief.

"Sitting Bull is not superstitious, like his brothers," he said, grimly; "and therefore he has no fear of the Demon of the Wood, or his pretended powers. He has come here to take to himself another squaw to be the queen of his wigwam. There are three there now, but two of them are of Sitting Bull's nation. He would add the white Forest Lily to his possessions."

Hazel Eye stepped back, haughtily.

"The chief may return to his wigwam, then, for he cannot have the Forest Lily. Her hand is not for such as Sitting Bull!"

The chief gave vent to a deep grunt, as if he were surprised, and took a step forward. But he halted immediately, for revolvers in the hands of Hazel Eye were levelled at his naked breast, with its many disfiguring scars and tattooed designs of wild animals, prominent among them the head and shoulders of a buffalo-bull.

"Let not Sitting Bull advance, unless he would court a merited death," Hazel Eye said, calmly, but sternly. "Let him return to his three wives and his wigwam, and forget the Forest Lily."

"Sitting Bull will go, for his life is at the mercy of Hazel Eye," the red demon said, a terrible glitter in his eye. "But he will not

forget nor forgive the Forest Lily, for the bitterness of death is in his heart. Sitting Bull is no fool. His eyes can read the heart of Hazel Eye as well as they can the cipher rocks. She has seen the young pale-faces, and lost her mind. Sitting Bull wills it that they shall die."

And with a scowl on his fierce face, he stalked away into the woods.

Hazel Eye watched him with dilated eyes until he had disappeared. Then she restored her pistols to her belt, and glanced at the cabin. Within it was very light, and she knew that the old magician was engaged in some of his strange experiments.

"I must save the young pale-faces from Sitting Bull's wrath," she murmured, glancing across the silent waters of the lake. "I must save them, for he would kill them without mercy, should he get upon their tracks."

Searching along the bank of the lake, she soon came upon a light skiff rocking idly in the water. Casting off the thong lashings, she sprang in and seized the oars. Another moment, and the boat was skimming along over the water, headed toward the Chop-pings.

To return to the dwarf scout, old Anaconda, whom we left upon the prairie beside the dead savage.

Not long did he remain there. Crawling back to the edge of the forest, he paused and listened intently. He was a little uneasy.

A strange silence seemed to be brooding over all nature, more than was usual, even at the dead of night.

The moon shed down a spectral light—the wind even had lulled, and scarcely a leaf quivered.

"Something's up!" the dwarf muttered. "I've seen too many sech lulls afore a storm ter not know how ter read 'em. Them 'ar woods ar' chuck full o' red-skins as sure's I'm an anti Injun lover. Ther varmints ar' 'broad in big numbers a-waitin' fer sumthin'. But I can't wait ter bother wi' many on 'em, fer ef them Owens folks ar' in sad tribulations, it's high time this old projectile o' thunder and blazes war about."

Unslinging his rifle, he held it in readiness for instant use, and then stole silently away into the edge of the wood, keeping the prairie not far to his left, and working along in a southerly direction.

He proceeded for a half-hour, or so, when he suddenly came to a halt, and crouched behind a fallen log.

Just ahead of him, not more than a dozen yards distant, a tall savage stood in a moon-lit spot, in an attitude of listening.

He was a noble specimen of the wild red-

man, and was armed with a breech-loading rifle, and a knife.

The first supposition of Old Anaconda, was that his approach had been discovered, but a moment of listening convinced him to the contrary.

Afar off in the woods came the echo of a loud voice, pitched at a high key, singing that National olden time song, "Yankee Doodle." Whoever the individual was, he was evidently a stranger in the land of the great North, where life oftentimes pays the forfeit of death for penetrating those solitudes.

The red-skin seemed to enjoy the primitive concert, for his neck was craned forward in the direction of the sound, and his eyes gleamed wickedly.

Old Anaconda, from his covert, watched him, with a grim smile, keeping his rifle, however, in instant readiness.

"The varmint cackylates, as how he'll hev ther pleasute o' raisin' thet feller's cap-sheaf, what be singin' like a black, double-headed night-in-gale, over yonder. Jest fer pie, I'll turn ther tables on him, and appropriate his skulp as he ar' intendin' to thet greeny's."

The savage, having evidently enjoyed enough of the nocturnal concert, now began to glide forward, with stealthy motion, his sharp eyes gleaming wickedly.

Rising from behind the log, Old Anaconda glided noiselessly after him.

For some time the stealthy chase continued, Anaconda gaining all the time, until he was within easy reach of the skulking red-skin, who was entirely unconscious of the proximity of the dread Dwarf Destroyer.

Suddenly Old Anaconda raised his rifle, and swung it over his head with a lightning movement, and the heavy barrel dealt the unsuspecting savage a blow beside the head that sent him crashing like a log to the ground.

The next minute the agile scout was astride his body; his flashing knife did the deadly work, and tore the scalp from the red-skin's crown.

"One more!" he muttered, hoarsely, as he arose from the ground, and stole away through the forest, "and still not enough. Were the whole cussed race o' red hellions dead, it would not pay for the wrongs I and others have suffered."

A few moments of swift but silent walk brought him to the edge of a small open glade in the heart of the forest, whence came the sounds of song. A glance explained all.

In the centre of the glade was a roaring fire, built beside a dry old stump, and seated upon a log in close proximity to the fire,

was the author of the singing, who had now branched off into the current epidemic—"Whoa Emma!"

In one word he was a Yankee.

This was evidenced by a jack-knife in his hand and a piece of pine, which he was whittling.

He was a long, lank, bony individual, with an ideal Yankee face, buttermilk eyes, a large mouth, and hair and chin whiskers of a fiery red hue. His make-up corresponded with the invariable newspaper etchings of Uncle Sam, from the white plug hat to the striped breeches and swallow-tailed coat.

A rusty musket with powder-horn and bullet-pouch constituted his only weapon of defence, while a wild hawk roasting by the flames evidenced the fact that he was not disposed to starve, even if he had to resort to the meaner fowls of the air.

Old Anaconda gazed at him keenly for a moment, then a smile hovered about his lips.

"A regular, downright, out an' out Yank," he muttered, with a chuckle. "Wonder who he is, anyhow? Ten to one he's as ignorant as Cain, an' a big coward. Jest for beans, I give him a test."

Slinging his rifle to his back, the scout got upon his hands and knees, and crawled stealthily out into the glade toward the stranger, whose back was turned on him.

Never did the Dwarf Destroyer move with more caution than now, as he crawled along.

A cat could not have moved with less noise.

Fully ten minutes were consumed in reaching a position directly behind the Yankee, who kept on whistling and whittling and singing.

"Gosh, tho', but it ar' rather lonesome up hyar, seems to me," the whittler muttered, as he gave the fire an extra poke, thereby sending a shower of sparks, heavenward.

"Thunder! Oh! Lord! Lord! git eout! shoo! go 'way! oh! oh! oh! Julius Cæsar Christofer Columbia!"

The scout had, before rising to a standing position in the rear of the Yankee, tied a cord to the bloody scalp he had so recently torn from the head of the red-skin; this he suspended upon the end of his rifle barrel, and slowly lowered the repulsive object before the eyes of the man from Michigan.

The frightened man made one leap without looking around, and cleared both the fire and the stump, striking the ground only to fall flat on his face, where, for a full minute, he lay trembling and panting from fright, while, on the other side, Old Anaconda was rolling around on the ground

convulsed with laughter. Hearing this noise, the Yankee finally arose and ventured around the fire, when the old scout arose with a huge grin.

"Gosh all fried cakes!" the man from Michigan ejaculated, surveying the dwarf-scout, critically; "Who be you, Cap? 'Pears to me ye're a dasted little cuss ter hev whiskers on ye."

"Big enough ter skeer the fits out o' you, tho'," Anaconda snorted.

"Pshaw! I warn't skeert a bit," protested the man from Michigan, snapping his fingers.

"Git out! You war skeart ni' ter de'th!" declared Old Anaconda. "Who be ye?"

"I'm Amasa Scroggs, from Kalamazoo, Michigan," was the reply.

"Kerwhoop! thet settles it. Never see' a man from Kalamazoo yit who warn't afeard o' his own shadder. But——"

The Dwarf Destroyer did not finish his sentence, for at this instant a chorus of fierce yells resounded upon the night, and a swarm of painted savages sprang from the forest into the glade.

And Sitting Bull headed the gang!

CHAPTER V

INTO THE PEN

THE ruffian, Canada Chet, evidently meant his demand to be persuasive, for he accompanied it with a broad oath.

"Whar's them young Yanks as cum in hyar a bit o' go?" he repeated, glaring around like a wolf in search of some morsel of food. "Show 'em to me, while I dissect 'em! Say, you, Abe Hooker, whar ar' them Yanks?"

"Dunno. Hain't see'd any," Hooker replied, innocently.

"You're an unmitigated old liar," Chet swore, angrily. "You've got them cusses hid, an' I know it. Boys, make a search for them kids, an' I'll give a gallon o' straight whisky to the galoot as will find 'em!"

This seemed to be a powerful inducement, for the wood-hawks set to work turning everything topsy-turvy in search of the concealed voyagers, while Canada Chet grasped Abe Hooker by the collar and held a cocked revolver to his heart.

He was a fierce-looking ruffian, this Canada Chet—a large-limbed, powerful six-footer, clad in buckskin and armed to the teeth, and the embodiment of all the evils of passion and crime in the calendar.

With rude oaths his band of roughs hauled

things about promiscuously in the little bar-room, for they were all men after the captain's own type, and had no care for anything except plunder and adventure.

"My whisky—ther galoots will drink it all up!" Hooker groaned in anguish of spirit, as he saw the precious liquor flow freely down the throats of the ransackers.

"So much ther better," Canada Chet said. "It will l'arn ye in future to keep a better article fer ther boys."

One of the searchers gave the barrels a whirl out from behind the bar, and sent them tumbling to another part of the room, where they would be out of the way.

As he did so, a faint sneeze came to the ears of Canada Chet, and he uttered an ejaculative oath.

"Whoa up! thar's music hayr," he roared. "Take an ax an' knock ther hoops off'm them barrels, jest fer fun, an' let's see if we ken't find a couple o' fugitives. Oho! Hooker, you are no good at stowing away precious freight."

"Swow to gracious, I didn't stow nothin' away. Ef anybody's in them bar'ls, they got in on ther sly while I was out a-milkin'!" the tavern-keeper averred, stoutly.

The Canadian only smiled, grimly, and watched the men assail the unoffending barrels. With axes and other sharp-edged tools they drove the hoops off, and then knocked the staves apart.

And there, in cramped positions, were the two young adventurers from Ottawa. They were speedily hauled out, by ready hands, and held up before Canada Chet, for they were too weak from semi-unconsciousness to stand alone.

The wood-ruffian surveyed them critically, an ugly expression upon his repulsive face.

"A pair o' babes in the woods," he said, sneeringly. "Say, ye young devils, w'at ever fetched ye to these parts? Didn't ye know thet Canada Chet war king o' these yere lattytudes, jest like Victoria aire boss, t'other side o' ther big puddle? Waal, I am thet same. I boss these hull British Possessions, I do, an' ary galoot as kicks against my monarky, he gits a bu'sted head."

"Who said contrary?" demanded Dave, independently.

"No one, younker, an' ye needn't be so sassy, nuther. But ye hain't told me w'at fetched ye heer, cusses on ye!"

"That ain't the finish of it—we ain't agoin' to, neither!" retorted Hal, in the true border language. "It ain't none o' your business what fetched us heer!"

"Ho! ho! we shall see if it ain't!" the Canadian cried angrily: "we shall see ef

Canada Chet ain't boss o' this yere hemisfeer. Fetch 'em along, boys, ter ther pen!"

And the ruffian turned toward the door, but stepped back with a growl of rage.

"Stop!" a stern voice cried, and Hazel Eye, the queen of the woods, stepped boldly through the open doorway, and confronted the chief. "Stop, Chet Howard, unless you would provoke the wrath of the Magician of the North."

The ruffian chuckled horribly.

"Once the old humbug, of the lake shore yonder, held power over me, but I've eluded his devilish spell. I no longer fear him, or any other pilgrim thet stands in boots."

"But you fear *me*!" Hazel Eye cried. "You dare not disobey me."

"And why not, pray, my pretty bird of the forest? How do I fear you?"

"I will tell you," Hazel Eye said, stepping toward him. Then lowering her voice to a whisper, she uttered two words—a single name, and then gazed at him with a triumphant laugh.

For he had leaped back with a frightful curse, his usually red face grown as white as death.

"Devils seize you!" he gasped, with a shudder. "What know you of—of——"

"I know enough to assure you that you have run nearly to the end of your halter; that your hour of doom is gradually but surely approaching!"

"An' ye dare ter imagine thet I'll surrender up these two youngers on ther' strength o' thet name?" he demanded, with a leer.

"I think you will find it to your advantage to do so—yes," Hazel Eye replied, coolly, as she toyed with the hilt of her revolver.

"Then, I ken tell ye, I won't do nothin' o' the kind!" the Canadian swore, pushing her rudely aside, and bolting through the door. "Cum erlong, b'yees, an' fetch them 'ar youngers."

The ruffians obeyed their commander's orders, and Hal Dayton and Big Track Dave were forced along out of the tavern into the town.

Hazel Eye exchanged glances with them, and then darted along into the forest out of sight.

The hearts of the two voyageurs fairly sickened with dread.

Dave Laam was the cooler of the two, for he had long since learned to master his feelings and to control his emotions.

Hal, on the other hand, was usually gay and careless spirited when his sun shone brightly, but gloomy and downcast when it was in under a cloud.

"I guess we'd better make an uncon-

ditional surrender, if so be that we can, and if we get a chance we'll skip back for Ottawa," he said, as they were forced along in none too gentle a manner. "I'd rather have another course through college, than much more of this life."

They were marched along through the forest village by the roughs, who were headed by Canada Chet.

The rough citizens and their families stood in the doorways of their cabins, making no effort to stop the strange nocturnal procession, for afraid were they of the Canadian ruffian and his backers.

On along the forest-lined lake shore were the two fugitives hurried, until a long barn-like cabin hove into sight, before the door of which they paused long enough for Canada Chet to unlock it.

Then they entered.

Hal and Dave looked about in some curiosity, but were not greatly surprised at anything they saw. The building was divided into several rooms, the first containing a bar.

Here the whole crowd took a drink, and then Dave and Hal were both blindfolded, and marched away into an adjoining room, where they were stripped of their clothing and supplied with loin cloths, such as many of the Indians wear during the hot weather.

They were then "separately lashed to strong, upright beams, with their faces toward the beam, and then the coarse, brutal voice of Canada Chet spoke so that they could hear.

"Neow, you sneaks, we've got ye like a bug in a rug. P'r'aps ye'll consent ter give us yer names, now?"

"Yes—mine's Hal Dayton," that young voyageur announced, eagerly.

"And mine's Dave Laam," Big Track thought best to add.

"So ho! I thort ye would cum ter time, after a bit," the Canadian chuckled. "Next, if ye please, ye may tell us w'at fetched ye heer inter this kentry?"

"Three things," Dave replied, "a love of adventure, a desire to see the country, and a hope to catch a few beaver, for which this place is noted."

"An' that's all, was et?"

"Every bit of it."

"Sure you never heard any suspicions cast out concerning this yere settlement?"

"Positive I did not."

"Wal, I guess ye're kerect, as I reckon no one ken't say much ag'in' our character as citizens. Howsumdever, you've cum in hayr, a-pryin' about, an' we don't allow no strangers heer, I'll allow; so we'll give ye a lash apiece and set ye ter work."

The lash was administered by a powerful

arm, and cut a gash in each of the voyageurs' backs, but they refrained from expressing their pain in words.

They were now unbound, and taken into an adjoining room, on entering which, the noise of clanking machinery reached their ears.

The bandages were now removed from their eyes, and they gazed about them in wonder.

It took but a glance to tell them that they were in a counterfeiter's den, on the outskirts of civilization.

Canada Chet, having motioned his men to retire, stood watching our young adventurers. The room was a large one, and lighted by lamps set in reflector brackets. In the daytime, sufficient light was admitted through the two narrow windows in the slanting roof.

Benches supplied with stools, lined either side of the room, while at the further end was a large smelting furnace in full blast. Upon the floor was a stamping machine turned by a crank, and also a machine somewhat resembling a printing press.

Men, young and old, were working at the benches—at the furnace and at the machines—men stripped of all raiment except a breech-cloth, as were Hal and Dave; some of them as young as Hal, while they ranged upward to men of old age.

"You see 'em all!" Canada Chet said with a wolfish leer; "ye mark 'em? Wal, they're all mine, an' so are you. You've seen the last o' the outside world for yer lifetime. In heer you're doomed to work in issuing counterfeit money, until ye aire ready ter put in under the sod. To ther right, here, ye see a sentry-box, containin' a man. He watches my slaves. At a sign of disturbance, or laziness among them, he pulls a signal and in comes my lion, ter trim them out. I'll show 'im ter ye," and the ruffian made a motion to the man in the sentry-box, who in turn dispatched a signal for the man.

A moment later the door opened and he entered.

A swarthy, low-browed, villainous-looking fellow he was, with a preponderance of the muscular, and as spry as a cat. He was armed with a thin-lashed bull whip, and there was a glare in his bloodshot eyes like that of a madman.

"You're not wanted, Le Garo," Canada Chet said. "You may retire. I only wanted these slaves to see you!"

The man bowed and retired.

Then the chief turned to Hal and Dave.

"You see the sorter man who bosses you," he said, grimly. "If you obey and work, all kerect; ef ye don't, he'll cut ye

open. Your work will be ter turn thet stampin' machine, hour 'bout, until a new recruit is nabbed, when you will be put at something else."

Then turning on his heels, the King of the North left the room, locking the door after him.

CHAPTER VI

A SCRIMMAGE

THAT was an unenviable situation in which Old Anaconda and Amasa Scroggs were placed. Both saw the Indians simultaneously, and both were not a little alarmed. Had there been but a few of them, the dwarf would have had more hopes; but they numbered full a score, and were led on by the great chief, Sitting Bull.

Old Anaconda gave Amasa Scroggs a keen glance, a suspicion arising in his mind that this same man from Kalamazoo might be some treacherous renegade, whom Sitting Bull had placed out in the woods as a decoy. But it required only one glance to dissipate this thought, for Scroggs was as white as a ghost, his knees knocking together and his teeth chattering in affright.

"Oh! Lordy—Jerusalem! Holy Moses!" he gasped, endeavouring to get behind the Dwarf Destroyer. "Oh, Jewhittaker Jimminy! what shall we do? oh! what shall we do?"

"Shet your port-hole, an' we'll do ther best we kin, shoot me fer a fiddler ef we won't!" Old Anaconda replied. "Can ye shoot?"

"Yas; I kin plumb a squar'l every time at a thousan' yards," Amasa assured, hopefully.

"Then cum behind ther fire hayr, an' when I fire you fire, an' don't waste a pin's head o' lead on anything but a greasy red-skin. D'ye heer?"

The two men leaped hastily behind the protection of the smoke which arose from the fire, and held their guns ready for rough work.

"Ready!" Old Anaconda replied. "Shoot certain. Now!"

The next instant, the report of two guns echoed through the surrounding forests. There was a responding yell from the red-men.

Old Anaconda had fired direct at the heart of Sitting Bull, but the bullet seemed not to take effect, for the terrible chief of the Sioux came on.

The effect of Amasa Scroggs's fusilade had been more disastrous to the noble red-men,

for his musket had been heavily loaded with buckshot, and as a result four red-skins went to the ground, more or less wounded.

Anaconda noted the success of the shot with a grin.

"Good shot," he said, with a chuckle, "and, now, while ye're loadin' up, I'll keep up ther divartissement jes' fer fun, ye see."

And raising his repeater, he carefully arose until he caught sight of a red-skin, when he "let drive."

Down went the savage, with a death-howl, while the Dwarf Destroyer gave a significant half-screach, half-yell.

"Another skunk on ther list, in atonement fer thet loss o' two years ago. Oh! but the list is getting long, yet my soul thirsteth for more. Come erlong, ye red-hued sons o' Old Nick. I'm ready ter accommodate ye," and again the Destroyer's rifle went to his shoulder, and cracked several times in rapid succession.

Each shot was answered by a terrible yell, such as can only come from an Indian who has received his death-blow.

"Jerusalem, what kind o' a machine d'ye call thet?" Scroggs demanded, as he arose from the process of loading his musket. "Swow ter gracious ef that don't almost lay over my constitution."

"I should remark thet same," Anaconda observed. "Quick, now! Give the cusses another salute, while I replenish my magazine."

Scroggs proceeded to obey, and the cannon-like report of his gun soon burst out upon the night, followed by an indiscriminate pandemonium of yells and screeches of rage.

Old Anaconda peeped from behind the stump, then burst into a loud laugh.

Fifteen of the previous score of assailants lay prone upon the battle-field, while the remaining five, including Sitting Bull, were now scurrying for cover, at a high rate of speed.

The Dwarf Destroyer quickly sprang to his feet, and his rifle again flew to his shoulder, with that rapidity of aim and fire characteristic of him. But this time his bullet went wide of the mark.

"Wal, they're gone!" he muttered, as the last red-skin disappeared under the cover of the forest. "The next work is to raise the scalps of them out yonder, but thet job'll hev ter be postponed fer ther present. I opine we'd better git fer cover ourselves."

Taking an opposite course from that taken by the red-skins, they hurried into the woods.

Here Old Anaconda threw himself upon the ground and pressed his ear thereto.

He arose directly, and there was an anxious expression upon his features.

"Thar's heaps o' ther red hellions in ther wood," he said, peering keenly around in all directions; "an' consequently thar's work for ther old Destroyer. I'm goin' ter Sittin' Bull's village ter rescue ther Owens, ef they've been tuk thar, as I cackylate they hev."

"W'at! Not whar all them Indians ar'?" Scroggs gasped, in horror.

"Yas; perzactly thar," the scout responded; "an' ef ye ar' skittish about goin' along, ye can hev ther choice of stayin' heer in ther woods."

Amasa groaned. What was he to do?

"Come! w'at are ye goin' ter do?" Old Anaconda demanded impatiently. "Time is skulps wi' me, an' I can't afford to be foolin' about long."

"Guess I'll stay here," the man from Kalamazoo at last decided. "It's six o' one an' half a dozen o' t'other, w'ich place I stay. Lordy! I wouldn't go ter an Injun village no quicker'n I'd bite my own head off."

"Which, jedgin' frum ther size o' yer fly-trap, you are perfectly able ter do," the Destroyer retorted, with a grin. "Waal, good-by ter ye! Look out fer yer hair, an' take my Christian advice an' shute every red skunk ye git a pop at."

And with these injunctions the eccentric dwarf scout hurried away into the forest.

After he had gone Amasa Scroggs peered sharply around him, to assure himself that there were none of the savages in his immediate vicinity; none were in sight, which was to him as good as a blessing.

"Wonder whar I'd best skedaddle to, anyhow?" he soliloquized. "Guess I'll go South and see what I can find thar."

Taking from his pocket a compass, he located the desired direction and set off.

In this way he tramped for several hours, when he finally paused to find himself at the edge of the same glade in which he and Old Anaconda had fought the battle with the Indians under Sitting Bull.

Yes, there could be no doubt of it, for there was the stump in the centre of the moonlit glade, still burning, and there were the bodies of the slain savages.

He had become bewildered in his tramp, and returned to his starting-point!

But hold! what sight is this his eyes behold?

There is an object of some kind moving about the burning stump—a strange, ball-shaped thing, whatever it might be, about the size of four men's heads combined.

From where he stood the Yankee had a good view of the thing, and his hair began to

stand upon end, as he perceived that it was indeed a human head, mounted upon a pair of feet, by which it managed to move.

The features were all there, only upon an enlarged scale—the mouth, the eyes, the nose, the ears, and indeed, the whole face being perfect and natural, while the rest of the head and neck from the forehead over back was covered with long coarse hair like a buffalo's mane.

And this frightful object, literally a walking head, was moving about the burning stump, from which would occasionally emanate a glare of blood-red light, to be followed, perhaps, by a glare of green and blue.

Amasa Scroggs stood in the edge of the forest, and gazed at the strange spectacle like one dumfounded.

"The devil's own region, by gracious," he gasped. "Gosh all fish-hooks! I guess they don't raise nothin' but dwarfs up this way, an' thet 'ar cuss out thar don't look as ef et war human. Sumbody's put a hull head on him, I'll swow ef they hain't. Leetler then ther dwarf injun-killer, I'll swow ter gracious. Oh! Lordy! Jerusalem!"

These latter ejaculations were caused by a gigantic column of red fire shooting from the stump, into the air, and reddening the very night as with a shower of blood. It was as if the heavens and the earth were afire for a few moments.

Then it died out, and the stump burned naturally.

The Yankee had crouched down upon his haunches, expecting instant annihilation, his teeth chattering like castanets.

Suddenly there soared a graceful column of fire into the air, resembling gold, and when at an altitude of a hundred feet, a single star detached itself from the expiring column, and burst into an avalanche of large stars of every bright colour of the rainbow. These gradually dissolved in the atmosphere until the last star drifted slowly to the ground.

The Dwarf Demon now came suddenly rolling toward the very spot where Amasa was crouching, and with a howl of terror the Michigander sprang to his feet, and darted away into the forest at the top of his speed.

CHAPTER VII

A HISTORY OF THE "PEN"

HAL and Dave were set to work at the stamping-machines about an hour after their arrival. And the brutal guard, Le

Garro, was on hand, with his terrible whip, which he seemed to take delight in playing over the backs of the offenders.

Dave turned the crank attached to the stamping-machine, while one youth of nineteen or twenty had in the alloy-box, coming forth from under the dies, the denominations twenty-five and fifty cents and the standard dollar. The work for our young *voyageur* was very hard and tiresome, but he stuck to it, determined to suffer fatigue rather than receive a blow from Le Garro's whip.

Hal's machine for the printing of bills was less hard to manage, and therefore the work allotted to him was comparatively easy, as the press was fed by an old, grey-haired man of sixty years, whose form was bent, and hands long and bony.

One of the rules of the establishment was that none of the slaves were allowed to speak to each other during working hours, under penalty of a lash for each and every word spoken. This was even more torture to our young adventurers than though they were not allowed to breathe, for the two privileges were to Hal equally dear.

As soon as daylight shone in through the transoms in the roof, another gang of workmen were brought into the room, and the previous gang, Hal and Dave included, removed to another apartment adjoining, fitted up with bunks and tables, the windows in the roof being heavily grated.

Here they were locked in, to make the best of their time until their turn again arrived.

Milk and roast fowl were spread upon different tables in liberal instalments, and the overworked slaves made hasty work of it.

Dave and the young man who fed his press, and Hal and his aged assistant, chanced to occupy one table, and accordingly opened a verbal acquaintanceship.

The young man's name was Harry Reynolds, while the elder slave rejoiced in the cognomen of Alex. Watchman.

After they had talked over the situation and their prospects for some time, the old man said:

"No; there is no hope of getting out of here, as long as the den is in existence. Ten long years have I served here, and during that time I have never seen one unguarded avenue of escape—not one! Everything is locked, barred, or guarded. As you may have imagined, this is one of the greatest counterfeiting dens in America—ay, I may add, in the world. All of the dies are so nearly perfect that it requires the most experienced expert to detect the bogus money from the genuine. The coins are of

uniform weight with silver. Of the silver pieces we manufacture and perfect about a hundred dollars per day, while of the paper we issue from one to ten thousand per week, the denominations being one, two and five dollar bills. None of larger figure being issued, because it is these larger bills that the expert watches most narrowly."

Harry Reynolds was a good-looking young fellow, and an enjoyable companion. He had been captured, a year before, while trapping along Beaver Lake, with a party of seven others—he being the only one to escape the massacre at the hands of Canada Chet.

Several hours of conversation ensued: then all hands sought rest upon the cots, preparatory to going on duty the coming evening.

Dave and Hal were in somewhat better spirits for their new companionship, although they each heartily wished themselves back in their comfortable homes in Ottawa.

Their chances of escape, however, appeared remote.

Canada Chet had a cabin of his own, not far from the "pen," where he usually spent his nights, waited upon by a half-breed lad.

On the morning following Hal and Dave's incarceration, the King of the North, as he was known among his intimates, sat smoking before his door, when a man rode leisurely up and dismounted. He was a stranger in the town, and Canada Chet eyed him narrowly without speaking.

A man of some five-and-forty he was, with a portly form and florid countenance, which was for the most part covered with a long, heavy growth of brown, glossy beard.

He was dressed in citizens' garb, with a Derby hat upon his head, as he paused and bowed before the Canadian.

"Do I behold the Right Honourable Mr. Chester Howard?" he demanded, in soft, effeminate tones.

"Yas, I reckon that's me," the ruffian grunted. "What in thunder d'ye want, anyhow?"

"That is easy to explain, after we arrive at the subject," was the reply.

"My name is Casper Dayton: an uncle, by the way, to one of the two boys you took into your service last night. I want to buy those boys—or, rather, one of them, my nephew, from you."

"They ain't fer sale," Canada Chet growled, fiercely. "I opine you're on the wrong trail, pilgrim."

"And I'll allow that I am not," the other replied. "Just listen to me for a few moments, and I will convince you to the

contrary. I have a little story to relate, which I believe will prove interesting to you.

"To begin with, I am the youngest of three sons, of a family of gentle blood named Dayton. My paternal relative was at one time a millionaire in the city of New York. Of course, to make my family history complete, there must be one black sheep in the flock, and I was the one. At an early age I was a disgrace to my proud family in many different ways, and was summarily kicked out into the world.

"My father and eldest brother finally left for the upper world, on an exploring expedition, and I being in prison at that time for burglary, the whole wealth was made over to my brother, who now lives in Ottawa, Canada.

"The property lies in New York State, and is all his, except one dollar, which I can claim at any time I choose to go forward, and risk being arrested as a forger. Ha! ha! Oh! you see I am familiar to every phase of crime—a heart-hardened wretch, my father denominated me on his death-bed.

"Now, then, all the human individuality that stands between me and that estate is this brother, and his son, not another heir being in existence. Therefore, I have ferreted the whole matter out, trailed the lad here, and now wish to purchase him, for spot cash. The old gent is on his way hither, I understand, but I chanced to get in ahead of him."

"An' so ye want the boy, hey?" Canada Chet interrogated, regarding his visitor sharply. "What would you do with him?"

"Take care of him, so that he would never lay a claim to the Dayton inheritance," the schemer replied, significantly. "Also, he should be so silenced as to never betray your secrets."

"My secrets!" the Canadian grunted.

"Yes—the secrets of the 'pen,' yonder, as you call it. He shall never cough aloud, even."

"Why! how in thunder did you find out that the pen had any secrets?" Canada Chet demanded, suspiciously.

"Oh! that's all right. If you want to know how, find out."

"Cuss it! who aire ye?"

"Casper Dayton, at your service."

"Why not leave the lad whar he ar'? He's in safe quarters, I'll bet!"

"Not safe enough for my purpose. I'd rather see him six feet in under ground. He'd be surer not to trouble me then."

"What'll ye give?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Can't have the lad short o' a thousand, durn me ef ye can!"

"A thousand? That's rough! But give me time to consider, and I'll let you know later."

"Do as ye please."

"I have the freedom of the town, then?"

"Reckon ye do," was the curt response; whereupon the Canadian arose and entered his cabin, and Mr. Casper Dayton mounted his horse and rode away up the lake shore.

He had scarcely left the cabin when a clump of bushes near the door parted, and there issued therefrom the face and form of Hazel Eye.

She gave a hurried glance around to note that her movements were unperceived, after which she glided on through the wood in the direction taken by Casper Dayton.

After riding on for a half a mile the schemer, Casper Dayton, drew rein at the water's edge, and dismounted. Leaving his horse to crop the herbage, he drew from his saddle-bags a collection of wearing apparel peculiar to an Indian chief, and donned it over his citizen's garb, transforming himself into part of a full-fledged Indian. He next removed the superabundance of hair from his face, it being all false, and proceeded to daub his face with war-paint, and ornament his headgear with a variety of painted quills and feathers.

After he had thus arrayed himself to his evident satisfaction, he stuck a couple of knives and a tomahawk in his belt, and surveyed his figure by aid of a small mirror which he also took from his saddle-bags.

A chuckle seemed to convulse him, and he finally burst into an evil, ringing laugh.

"What a noble warrior I make, anyhow!—a full-fledged Indian cut-throat, no doubt. What will my good brother, Sitting Bull, say when I make my debut in his presence? Ha! ha! I did not tell the Canadian that another errand brought me here! My next duty is to hunt up the cabin of the Owens, for there is a fair gal there, whom I would make my wife—perhaps!"

He finished his soliloquy by mounting again, and riding on through the forest.

Without a noise the girl of the forest, Hazel Eye, stole on in pursuit, until she reached the end of the lake, where she turned off toward the magician's cabin, while the schemer kept on in a north-easterly course which he evidently calculated would bring him to the home of the beaver trapper, Owen.

Hazel Eye hurried along swiftly, now, and soon reached the cabin of the magician. But it required the usual formality of knocking before she could gain admittance.

"Grandpa, a new stranger has come to the woods."

The old man started and wheeled upon her with a curious stare.

"A new man?" he interrogated, in evident surprise.

"Yes, and something tells me that he is the enemy you have so long feared."

"Ha! ha! I have made ready for him then!" the magician said, with a chuckle. "Let him come. But the name—the name, Hazel Eye?"

"It is Casper Dayton."

"Ah! then it is indeed the same!" he muttered, with a groan. "He shall not surprise me, however, for I will watch for him—ay! I'll foil him!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE INDIAN BEAUTY

AFTER leaving Amasa Scroggs in the woods, Old Anaconda struck off to the north and strode swiftly along in a direction which he calculated would bring him in the neighbourhood of Sitting Bull's village.

For the remainder of the night he tramped steadily along, without pausing to rest—without relaxing his vigilance in the least.

Toward morning he paused to drink of the cool fresh waters of a bubbling spring, which spread out in his path. Then he went on again until day had dawned—the moon had fully hidden itself away, and the sun was shoving its face above the eastern horizon.

He now came to a halt on the edge of the timber, where it was met by a beautiful stretch of undulating prairie, several miles in circumference.

Before him lay the village of the great Sioux chief, Sitting Bull, who, a fugitive from the land of his birth, had fled into the far North where American law had no control.

The village covered something like five acres of ground, and was surrounded by a high wall of adobes, which was topped off with a parapet of pointed sticks. To obtain access to the village, however, one had to enter through the gates upon the southern side.

For some time he stood gazing down upon the village.

In vain did Anaconda watch for some sign of life. Not a sound nor a sight, except white spiral columns of smoke from the different lodge tops, answered his patient watch.

At last he glanced around him, as if intuition had warned him of the near presence of somebody or something. His glance

brought forth an ejaculation, for not three yards away was an Indian girl, half-reclining upon a mound at the foot of a tree, engaged in working beads upon the moccasin she held in one hand.

She was the most beautiful creature, thought the scout, that he had ever seen, excepting none, white or red.

Resolved upon having a word with her, he advanced a few paces until she looked up with a startled exclamation, when he doffed his hat and bowed low. She arose to her feet and retreated a few paces where she paused, a scared, uncertain look in her wild, pretty eyes.

"Why is the Indian maiden abroad so early in the forest?" Old Anaconda respectfully inquired, speaking in the English tongue, for he was aware that not a few of the latter-day Sioux could speak that tongue.

The girl started and trembled as if confused at the presence of a stranger, then spoke:

"Wild Bird comes into the woodland that she may listen to the songs of her sister birds, and where she can be alone and unmolested."

"Then ye don't like it down there in ther camp o' Sitting Bull, eh?" the Dwarf Destroyer asked, approaching closer, and throwing himself on the leaves at her feet, as she resumed her seat upon the mound.

"The heart of Wild Bird was never with the Sioux nation," was the reply, as her pretty eyes gazed off over the prairie, dreamily. "She was once of the powerful Pawnee tribe, but Sitting Bull has slain the last of her people, and brought the Wild Bird to his wigwam."

"Sitting Bull has many squaws in his lodge, has he not?" the scout asked.

"Sitting Bull has many wives, but Wild Bird is not his wife, nor are the two white maidens. Wild Bird is the Princess of the Sioux, and Sitting Bull respects her and allows her freedom, which he does not extend to the two pale-face maidens. They wait upon him, and do his bidding."

"And Wild Bird loves the Sioux chief, and will soon become the Queen instead of the Princess of his tribe?" the scout interrogated.

A startled look came into the Wild Bird's eyes at the suggestion.

"No; the Sitting Bull has no charms to attract the eye of the Wild Bird. He is a great warrior, but Wild Bird does not yearn to become the squaw of one of her own race. She has better hopes for herself. The pale-face does not abuse his wife like the Indian, and is much kinder to her."

"Waal, I'll be transmogerfied inter a bar'l o' tanglefoot ef thar ain't some truth in that, my gal! An' I reckon there's many a pilgrim as would grab at the chance to get sech a beauty as you fer a wife, ter love and take keer ov her."

The eyes of the Indian girl brightened, visibly.

"Did the Wild Bird ever heer o' ther white terror, Old Anaconda, the Dwarf Destroyer?"

The maiden's eyes dilated wildly, as she replied:

"Wild Bird has heard of the intrepid Indian-fighter who is the great foe of the Sioux, and she has longed to see him."

"Waal, I'm them same, you bet, leetle gal! ther old hoss himself."

"Wild Bird is glad, for she has yearned to hear the cause of his hatred for the Sioux," and, with childish innocence, the Princess put out her hand.

The dwarf scout took it gently, and pressed it, after which he let it go, as if afraid to hold in his rough palms a hand so warm and soft.

"Waal, ye shall heer the story, Wild Bird," he said, gazing moodily down into the sunlit plain below them, his brows shaded by a cloud; "ye shall heer all about it, an' then mebbe ye'll allow I've hed sum reason fer liftin' so much ha'r."

"Ye see, me an' mine were ther fu'st, or among ther fu'st ter enter ther Black Hills kentry, previous ter ther breakin' out o' ther gold fever. I had my leetle cabin along one o' ther tributaries ter ther Rosebud, an' I trapped an' hunted, got a good livin', an' war happy wi' my wife an' child. Ye see, I nevyer war no beauty, an' when I an' my Daisy got hitched, I calculate she didn't marry me fer beauty, but because she liked me. Leasthow, she war a leetle angel of a wife, an' we allus got along as nice an' happy as ther day war long. Then, arter awhile, our leetle Fanny came—the pretty, sunny-haired leetle beauty, an' we counted ourselves supremely blessed."

"I trapped many streams, and collected many beautiful furs. We war in the third year o' our prosperity in our new home, and hedn't nevyer hed no trouble wi' ther redskins, when suddenly one day Sitting Bull came to my cabin, during my absence, and murdered and mutilated almost beyond recognition my poor wife and sunny-haired baby! I returned home to find my cabin-home burned, and the scalpless bodies o' my wife an' child lying close at hand. An' thar, over ther bodies, I swore to have a Sioux scalp for every drop of the precious blood shed from their veins. God knows I have striven to make good my promise!"

And as he finished speaking, the scout gazed at Wild Bird—tears in his eyes.

"Wild Bird's heart aches for the noble pale-face scout," she said earnestly, "and her anger is strong against the Sioux. Sitting Bull is no warrior if he has murdered a weak and helpless babe. Wild Bird despises him. She would die sooner than to become his queen now. Her heart is with the White Destroyer."

"Waal, leetle gal, I thank you, and I reckon you an' I can get on as friends anyhow. Would the Wild Bird leave the village of the Sioux?"

"Where would Wild Bird go? She has no home—she could but wander in the forest, where her sisters of the air have their coverts."

"But if some pale-face would offer to marry the Wild Bird, and take her to dwell with him in his cabin, would the Wild Bird go, even though the pale-face be dwarfed and not so handsome as many of his brothers?"

An eager light shone from the beautiful maiden's eyes, and arising she advanced and knelt before the scout, and kissed him upon the forehead.

"Wild Bird says yes," she said, earnestly, her bosom heaving, and an overjoyed expression upon her pretty, dusky face.

"That settles it, then," Old Anaconda said, drawing her to him and kissing her cherry lips.

The beautiful Indian girl gently withdrew herself from his embrace and arose to her feet.

"Wild Bird's pale-face lover must not think to deceive or betray the Indian maiden," she said. "He has kissed her, and must not touch her again until she is his by right of marriage."

"All right, Birdie; an' thet sha'n't be put off long, you bet! My trail of vengeance ar' purty nigh at an end, an' then we'll go back across the line and settle down. Now, will the Wild Bird help me to rescue the white maidens from Sitting Bull's power?"

The Indian girl started, as if stung by a pang of jealousy.

"Why would the White Destroyer seek the pale-face maidens?" she demanded, quickly.

"Old Anaconda would rescue them from captivity and send them back to their homes, because they are of his blood and colour. But let not Wild Bird, the Beautiful, fear. The old man'll stick to her, you bet! Not so very old, nuther—only eight-an'-thirty, though I've suffered pain enough fer fifty. Waal, waal, what's your ans'er, little pet?"

"Wild Bird will help the White Destroyer in his plans; she loves him, and will fight for him!" was the earnest reply.

CHAPTER IX

IN SITTING BULL'S VILLAGE

WILD BIRD consented to return to the village and prepare the way for the Dwarf Destroyer. The beautiful creature seemed wholly wrapped up in her warm affection for the scout. It had ever been her brightest hope that she might become the wife of a pale-face, and she was now happy in the thought that her dreams were soon to become a reality.

"But hold up, Birdie," the Destroyer said, as she was about to take her departure; "there are a few questions I have neglected to ask you."

"The Wild Bird listens."

"Then, who are the pale-face captives Sitting Bull has in his wigwam?"

"Both are young squaws."

"But their names—what are they?"

"They call each other Milly and Rachel."

"Humph! The girl Milly has sunny hair, has she not?"

"Yes—hair like the summer sky."

"How long ago was she brought to the lodge of Sitting Bull?"

"Only last evening, from the trapper's cabin."

"And her parents were not brought with her?"

"No; they were massacred by the warriors of Sitting Bull."

Old Anaconda shuddered. He knew the Owens well, and a feeling of horror crept over him as he pictured in his mind the trapper and his wife lying either roasting in the fire of their burning cabins, or rigid in death from a blow of the murderous tomahawk.

But, even as the picture was before his eyes, he swore a silent oath to continue his deadly work against the Sioux, until not one of the murderous race remained to follow the war-trail.

"Wild Bird must go, now," the beautiful maiden said, "or Sitting Bull will return and discover her absence, and be very angry."

Then, kissing her hand at the dwarf, the dusky beauty walked gracefully away down out of the edge of the forest toward the Indian village.

Old Anaconda gazed after her until she had disappeared within the gates. Then turned back further into the forest, and

made a careful examination of his weapons, to see that they were in condition.

He then crept forward again to the edge of the timber, and throwing himself upon the leaves, dozed away the time in the sunlight. For he was in no particular hurry to make his venture in the Sioux village, during the broad light of day.

He waited all day long in the edge of the forest, without the least visible impatience. Indeed he had many a time lain in wait the better part of twenty-four hours in order to entrap a savage.

During the day several delegations of savages, numbering from ten to twenty in each, approached and entered the village, but Sitting Bull was not among them.

Anaconda noted this fact, with contracting brows.

"More devilry brewing somewhere, I'll bet," he muttered. "Et don't matter so much now, fer thar war none o' ther settlers hyarabouts as war wu'th sculpin', 'cept Tom Owens. Poor feller, et war a shame about him. Them 'ar settlers at Quinnebog ar' nothin' but pirates anyhow, o' which thet Canada Chet ar' a fair sample."

At last the sun set, and the shadows grew thick in the prairie, below the wood line.

The camp-fire light from the village reflected against the heavens with wonderful distinctness, and the noise that floated up on the evening breeze from there bespoke the fact that the Indians were wide awake over some discovery.

The scout's curiosity was aroused, but he made no venture toward the spot, for he knew that to betray his presence in the neighbourhood would only be the means of stimulating the watchfulness of the camp. He therefore lay quietly in the edge of the timber and waited until he should find the camp silent enough for his purpose.

During this delay he heard a footstep in his rear, and turned to behold one whom he least expected—Hazel Eye. She came forward, carrying her handsome rifle in her hand, and nodded as the scout saluted.

"Great Lamentations! is that you, Forest Lil? I didn't expect to see ye 'way up heer," the dwarf scout said, as he arose and shook her hand. "How's things in Quinnebog, anyhow?"

"Bad," Hazel Eye said, shaking her head. "Canada Chet has taken two more prisoners, and put them in the pen."

"Well, we'll have to see to their cases d'rectly," said Anaconda. "At present, however, I have another case on the docket."

"You are not going to make an attempt to enter the Indian village?"

"I am thet same, you bet! Thar's two gals thar—old Owens's gal, Milly, an'

another 'un, called Rachel. I'm goin' ter resky 'em."

"Ain't you afraid to make so dangerous a venture?"

"Nary. I've been in wuss hoels 'n that, in my time."

"Well, be careful. Where will you take the rescued girls?"

"To my fort in the woods. You know where thet is?"

"Yes. I will come there, by and by."

Then the Forest Lily turned back into the depths of the wood.

It was now bordering on the midnight hour. The Indian village had quieted down, and the camp-fires burned low.

"Et's now fer me ter work," Anaconda muttered, strapping his rifle to his back, and preparing for his venture. "I'll either resky them gals or give Wild Bird a chance to mourn over my scalp."

Securing his revolvers, he prostrated himself, and crept away.

Away out of the timber, and down over the rolling prairie he went, at a snail's pace, pausing occasionally to listen and peer ahead. At the end of an hour he arrived close to the gates, and found one of them a trifle ajar—just enough that only a sharp glance would have detected the fact.

On pressing his ear to the crack he could hear no sound, and waiting a few minutes longer he pulled one open sufficient to admit his passage through, and then closed it after him. Standing in the shadow of the great fence, he gazed about upon the scene.

Presently Wild Bird glided up to him.

"Has the white hunter come to take Wild Bird to his wigwam?" she asked.

"Yes, that's my intention," the Destroyer replied. "But thar's a couple of others I must take along."

"Yes, Wild Bird has not forgotten. She has told her sisters, and prepared them for the great scout's coming."

"Bully for you," said Anaconda. "But where is Sitting Bull that he didn't come into the village?"

"Sitting Bull is abroad in the great forest. Some evil project is in his mind that none can solve. He has set an eye upon the Forest Lily, Hazel Eye, and Wild Bird thinks he is watching for her."

"Waal, now, when he ketches thet gal sleepin' when danger's brewin', he's welcome to her," Anaconda muttered, with a chuckle.

"She's purty nigh a good 'un, ar' thet Hazel Eye. But fer beauty, she ken't hold a candle to the Wild Bird."

"Whar ar' the guards?" he asked, peering cautiously around.

"They drank of whisky furnished by Wild Bird, and sleep deep," the Indian

beauty replied. "Anaconda need have no fear of them, but must work cautiously lest he arouse those in the lodges."

"Where are the white girls?"

Wild Bird pointed across the square to a small lodge.

"The Destroyer will find them there, in readiness. While he goes for them, Wild Bird will bring her horses."

With this understanding they separated, Anaconda going silently across the village green to the lodge, and the graceful Wild Bird gliding towards the corral, to get the horses ready.

Having completed his disguise, Casper Dayton, under the assumed title of Watsanoka, sought out Sitting Bull. After sounding the Chief regarding his knowledge of Canada Chet and his movements, and finding that he seemed to know very little, he proceeded as follows.

"Then lend me your attention and I will tell you something of which you have probably never dreamed; you have probably heard of the 'Pen,' as it is called, where scores of men are supposed to be confined by the border ruffian, Canada Chet. No one else ever enters inside the walls of the 'Pen'; all wonder, but do not know what use these men are put to, or what mystery envelops the place. Has Sitting Bull never guessed at the secrets thereof?"

"No; Sitting Bull has never guessed the secrets of the Pen. Does his white brother know the secrets?"

"Like a book," the disguised schemer replied, "and he has come to make a bargain with the great and noble Sitting Bull. Let the chief listen: there are two American youths in the Pen, whom I would possess. They have but recently come to the forest."

"Watsanoka cannot have them," Sitting Bull said decidedly; "one of the pale-face youths has won the heart of Hazel Eye, the Forest Lily, and the great Sioux chief would have his scalp."

"But hold up. There is much that Sitting Bull would rather have—something he prizes more than scalps, women and horses. If Wild Bull will promise that the white boys shall be Watsanoka's, he will tell the great chief a strange secret."

"Sitting Bull will hear first and promise afterward," the chief replied craftily.

Casper Dayton reflected a moment, and then said, "I will tell you if you will promise to give me up the boys, and a girl named Milly Owen, should the news prove valuable and interesting to you."

"Sitting Bull agrees to that. Let the pale-face speak."

"Well, then, here is the secret: the Pen,

at the Choppings, is a counterfeiters' den, where spurious coin and paper money are manufactured in large quantities."

"Money heap no good," Sitting Bull said. "No buy blankets and powder."

"Yes it will. Now I'll tell you what I'll do. You have many warriors. Go you and kill off this Canada Chet and his gang, together with the lumbermen of Quinnebog, and we'll go in pardners in this counterfeiting biz."

"Sitting Bull is not blind. It shall be as Watsanoka says. He shall have the trapper's daughter whom Sitting Bull has in his wigwam."

"It is well," said Casper Dayton. "Sitting Bull may keep the trapper's daughter in his wigwam until the war is over, when Watsanoka will take her for his wife."

"How does Watsanoka know the trapper's daughter if he is a stranger in the North?"

"Easily answered. A year ago the Owens lived in Minnesota, and Watsanoka also lived nigh. He wooed the pale-face girl, but she refused him, and he swore to one day possess her. That day is near."

The twain separated, Sitting Bull riding through the forest toward his village and Casper Dayton taking a course nearly opposite.

The schemer was overjoyed at his success in enlisting Sitting Bull in his plans, and smiled triumphantly as he rode along.

"Lordy! Jerusalem! Jewhaker Jewsharp! I wish I was back in Kalamazoo, I do, gol durn my foolish soul!"

The speaker was Amasa Scroggs, of course, in difficulty, as usual. He had been wandering aimlessly about through the forest in search of something to appease his appetite, when there had come a whir! and an arrow scratched the "crazy-bone" of his right elbow. Amasa had made one of his lightning leaps which carried him behind the protective body of an upturned tree, where he crouched and gave vent to his howl of misery.

"Oh! Gosh-all-fish-hooks!" he gasped, peering around in the blackness of the night; "thar's a hull caboodle of them durned ribs over thar, an' they're after my scalp. Ugh! I wish I was back in Kalamazoo!"

Rising to his feet he peered around the stump, expecting to behold an Indian.

The next instant a horrified yell pealed from his lips, for there, not three yards away, was the terrible Walking Head advancing toward him, the mouth stretched from ear to ear in a horrible grin, and the tongue lolling out in a hideous manner.

It stopped before the horror-struck Yankee, and gazed up into his face, one eye rolling and blinking viciously.

"Be not afraid!" came the words, in a sepulchral voice. "The Demon of the Forest harms not the weak and timid. Come! follow me, for there are many savages after your scalp. They fear me, and will not molest you if you come with me!"

"Oh! Lordy! Jerusalem! I'd ruther be scalped than go wi' you!" Amasa gasped, with a shiver. "Oh! say, please run off, little feller, won't ye? I never hurt you—I—I—"

"You must come with me, and as soon as I get you out of the reach of the Indians, I will bid you adieu!"

"Fer honest, now?"

"Certainly. Come!"

"Waal, hang me ef I won't."

The Walking Head with a low laugh led the way—waddling off into the forest.

Amasa followed, but at a respectful distance, for he still held the Demon of the Forest in mortal dread.

Through the blackness of the night, they went, the Walking Head in advance.

But, suddenly, Amasa gazed around him in perplexity. The Dwarf Demon had suddenly disappeared! Nowhere was he to be seen, and Scroggs was again lost in the great woods.

CHAPTER X

THE NEW FOF

WE must now return to "the Pen," and its surroundings.

That night, just as they were about going to sleep, Hal and Dave were disturbed by strange noises, which they could not account for—noises that sounded like human screams of agony, in the distance.

But these sounds soon were heard no more, and both being really fatigued, needed no urging to seek forgetfulness and rest.

They slept soundly and awoke after a long while, feeling refreshed. Alex. Watchman, Harry Reynolds, and several others were up and about, already, while some still lingered in bed.

During the interval of their slumber the tables had been replenished with milk and corn-cake, familiarly known as "Johnny-cake."

Dave and Hal partook of their corn-bread and milk with relish, and were then ready for work.

Some of the slaves arose grumblingly, others cheerful.

By this time Le Garo appeared upon the scene, armed with his terrible whip, and looking more brutal and savage than before.

The slaves, Dave and Hal included, filed out in single file into the counterfeiting room, when the others, who had just quit work, filed into the sleeping-room.

That was a dreary night tour for Dave and Hal. Neither had ever been used to hard labour before, and it was no play to run the two heavy machines for twelve hours.

But they worked steadily and faithfully, and were fortunate in not experiencing the sting of Le Garo's lash with which he occasionally cut the lagging or tricky.

Our two adventurers, however, learned the science of counterfeiting, and profited thereby.

The coins were manufactured of lead, zinc, copper and silver, the cost of a dollar, after it was finished, being about twenty cents, so that the profits of the "queer" was about 80 per cent.

The cost of the manufacture of the paper money was, of course, far less, as the whole token of the work was engraved upon steel, even to the signature. The paper and ink, therefore, were the only expense, as the labour cost nothing.

The hours would never hurry. Hal and Dave were both fatigued greatly, and hungry, in the bargain. But there was no hope of relaxation from their labours, until the morning dawned again.

It came, at last, and they were replaced by the fresh gang, and marched back to the eating and sleeping-room, where they were locked in like a band of convicts.

"I'm getting confounded tired of this," Big-foot Dave growled, when he, Hal, Harry Reynolds, and Alex. Watchman were again seated at the repast of corn-cake and milk. "I'm going to make an attempt at escape. If the rest will go in with me, I've every confidence that we can break away and reach the woods without trouble. What do you say, friend Watchman?"

The old man shook his head.

"'Tis vain to hope for such a blessing," he replied, sadly. "Why, young man, have not a hundred attempts been made, and all failed?"

"Hang the odds!" Big Track replied. "I've made up my mind not to do another day's work in this counterfeiters' den, and I'll be hanged if I will! If any man in this room has enough desire to escape, that he will assist me, let him step forward. Those who fear the consequences of a failure can keep still."

The slaves came forward to a man. No desire had they to remain in the pen, if there was a shadow of a chance for escape.

Dave sounded them all carefully, to see that there were no weak ones.

"I'll tell you how I'm going to manage it," he said, glancing up toward the roof of the solid structure. "Those windows there are grated, but they won't be so very long, if there is enough of you to boost me up and hold me there."

There were enough, and he prepared at once for his venture for their liberty.

Taking two of the cave knives which were brought in with their meals, he carefully hacked nicks into their edges, thereby making tolerable saws out of them.

He then mounted upon one of the tables, and was lifted up by several pairs of ready hands, and held there.

He now discovered that the act of removing the iron bars was easier than he had at first supposed, as they were only fastened to the wood with screws. These he soon had out, and the bars were removed; after which, to displace the glass window was but the work of a moment, and a stream of the fresh air of the outer world rushed in.

By placing the table upon which he stood on top of another table, and raising both together, his companions were enabled to raise him so that he could look out of the hole upon the roof.

All he could see was the tops of the trees, and a sparkle of water upon the lake. The sun was shining brightly, and the birds were caroling their early morning songs among the wilderness of variegated foliage, that spread out beautifully before the naked eye.

From afar off in the forest came wild, discordant sounds, which boded no good to the town of Quinnebog.

They were Indian war-cries.

Springing upward, and drawing himself outside upon the roof, Dave Laam looked around him for some means with which to rescue his companions.

Fortune seemed to favour him in directing his attention to a matting of wild grape-vines which had twisted into a natural rope up over the roof, from the ground, and into the trees above.

Creeping down to the edge of the roof, he severed these vines, and dragged the loosened end back to the hole and dropped it through into the room below.

He then held fast to the upper portion, until one by one every man had ascended to the roof, where they stood, in the blast that swept across from the lake.

"The next question is, what shall we do?" said Hal, gazing about, and listening, with the others, to the sounds, which came

from off in the forest. "Can't we somehow get possession of our clothing and weapons?"

"No! that is impossible," Alex. Watchman said, promptly.

"We ought to fervently thank God that we have been permitted, through the heroism of our brave comrade here, to escape from the living tomb at all. To be sure it isn't a very desirable plight to be in, this being ungarbed, but it is a blessing compared to that imprisonment. If we can but get away from the vicinity of the Pen, unobserved, I know of the cabin of an old scout, in the forest, where we can find skins to cover our nakedness. But we run a great risk of discovery by descending to the ground. Besides the forest is full of Sioux, judging from the yells we hear."

"I do not intend to descend to the ground," Big Track Dave said, decidedly. "You observe how matted together are the branches of the nearest trees! We must make our escape from tree to tree, which I think we can do, if we work carefully. Once well away from 'the Pen' we can descend to the ground and make off with our best speed."

After occasional advances and halts they found themselves among the branches of a gigantic oak, where they were quite secure. While all hands were talking over the situation, Hal Dayton and Harry Reynolds ascended into the extreme top of the tree, to make observations.

A strong east wind had sprung up, and what they saw was not in the least encouraging.

The horizon was hidden by a dense smoke-cloud, and great volumes of smoke and burning leaves were streaming up out of the forest, in nearly all points of the compass.

The woods certainly were on fire. The savages evidently had kindled the fires to roast out the village and consummate their fiendish work.

"We shall have to dust out of this mighty lively, if we don't want our bacon roasted," Hal said, and the two boys slid down hastily to where the others were perched, and apprised them of their discovery.

"There is no use of sticking to the trees any longer," Dave said, gloomily. "We've got to get down to *terra firma* and peg out as fast as our legs can carry us. How far are we from the cabin you mentioned, Watchman?"

"About three miles, I think. It must lie somewhere to the north-west of us, I should say."

They hastily descended from the tree and set off at a swift trot, Watchman and Dave in advance. The leaves and stubs hurt their feet, and the briers and bushes tore

their flesh, but they kept bravely on, knowing that they were now fleeing from an enemy even more remorseless and merciless than the savage prowler of the forest.

Suddenly they burst out into an opening where a fire was burning, and before they could retreat, a wild, triumphant war-whoop burst upon their hearing.

CHAPTER XI

A CUT AND RUN DASH

IN due course Old Anaconda emerged from the lodge with the two white girls. In the meantime Wild Bird had got the horses ready. Anaconda hastily lifted Milly Owen and Rachel Connors into the saddle.

"Nothing must stop us now!" he said, in a husky tone. "Mount, Wild Bird, and when I throw the gates open, ride out upon the prairie, and head to the north. I will be with you ere long. Sitting Bull is yet some distance away, I judge."

"But his cries will arouse the braves in the village!" Wild Bird said, trembling.

"So much the worse for us," Anaconda replied. "Now then, git ready."

Wild Bird vaulted lightly to the back of her horse, and took the connecting straps which guided the other animals.

"Ready!" she said; then Old Anaconda threw open the gates and leaped like a rocket into the saddle allotted to him.

"Now!" he gritted, "let 'em scoot!"

He kept the bridle-strap of the horse rode by Milly Owen, while Wild Bird did the same for her charge. And away they dashed at a tremendous speed, over the dun prairie to the south-west.

At the moment of leaving the village the dusk had been dense, which was favourable to their escape. But such good fortune was not to be theirs, and in the next few minutes a bank of clouds soon floated away from the path of the moon, and a flood of mellow light suffused all the landscape in a sheen of silver glory.

An instantaneous shout came from the south, and Anaconda glanced about to see a band numbering some thirty Indians, coming after them, in hot pursuit.

"It is Sitting Bull and his warriors, too!" Wild Bird said. "They are picked braves, and well mounted."

"Consekently, our only crop is ter git up an' git!" the Destroyer replied, urging on the animals to a lively gallop. "If we ken but get inter ther woods, old Sittin' Bull can

kiss my big toe. Spur up yer hoss, Wild Bird—whoopee! I tell you we don't ask no odds o' ther hull Sioux nation."

On—on, over the yielding turf, sped the pursued and pursuers. It was a race for life on the part of the fugitives, and a race for scalps on the part of the foe. To add to the strength of the latter, the moonlight revealed that the whole male population of the Indian village was turning out upon horseback, and joining in the chase.

And so the wild ride continued.

At last they struck into the edge of the forest, the savages being then a quarter of a mile or more away.

"Now, then, we'll puzzle them!" Old Anaconda said, with a chuckle, as he took the lead. "Foller behind me close now, in single file, an' we'll see ef we can't git them off ther track purty much!"

He accordingly struck off, with Milly Owen and Rachel Connors following respectfully behind him, and Wild Bird bringing up the rear.

It was a long, monotonous ride, with only the footfalls of the horses, and the occasional scream of a night bird to break the dead of nature's repose.

The woods were full of lurking shadows, that served to keep the two white girls in a constant state of terror, lest they should suddenly dissolve into a band of murderous savages.

At last morning dawned, and the birds renewed their sweet songs among the branches of the forest monarchs.

Then it was that the Dwarf Destroyer ordered a halt. Wild Bird and the two white girls noticed a strange expression upon the scout's face, which was not usually there.

"What is it?" the Wild Bird demanded anxiously. "Why does the Destroyer look around so?"

"Dunno, Birdie, just now; but I reckon we'd better camp down hayr a trifle, while I make a sorter reconnoissance. Sumhow my old bones predict Injuns!"

"Great Heaven! I hope your bones may belie you!" Rachel Connors said, in alarm. "Do you think the savages are in the neighbourhood?"

"Can tell ye better after a bit," the Dwarf Scout said, sliding from the saddle. "You remain here and do not dismount under any consideration until I return, unless you hear the yell of a Comanche, then turn sharp to your right, and ride for your life."

With these injunctions, he unslung his rifle, and stole cautiously away into the wood, leaving his horse in charge of Wild Bird.

He proceeded in a straight line due east

from where he had left the females; then stopped stock-still in his tracks.

Ahead of him he could see the forms of several Indians skulking about among the trees as if searching for somebody.

They did not see him, however, and he crept back in the direction whence he had come; then proceeded to make a great circle about the spot where he had left the girls. As a result, he found Indians skulking among the trees, forming a circle around the spot of forest containing Old Anaconda and his trio of charges.

This was the very state of affairs the old man had expected. He knew that it meant business, that only fighting them with stealth would do any good.

Then, he returned to where he had left the girls. They were in a state of grave anxiety.

"Indians!" he said, in answer to their inquiring looks. "We are literally surrounded on all sides."

"Did the Destroyer see Sitting Bull?" Wild Bird asked.

"No! ther durned old skeeslyx kept out o' my sight, or I shed hev put a bullet thr'u' his kernoodleum. Just keep still now, while I think."

And standing with his face to the east, the scout ruminated over the situation.

"Thar's only one plan, an' we've got ter grab it like a fish grabs bait!" he said, at last. "Do you think you could send the horses away riderless, Wild Bird?"

"The animals of Wild Bird are trained to do her bidding," the beautiful Indian girl replied, proudly.

"Good! Our hope may then be a hope. Come! Foller me!"

And vaulting into his saddle the scout rode on through the woods. The three girls followed, wonderingly, but asked no questions.

By his directions they lingered behind, allowing him to get some distance ahead.

Suddenly he arose in his stirrups, and clinched his hands to the limbs of a giant linden tree beneath which he was passing. The next instant he had drawn himself up, and his horse passed on. He then motioned the three girls to ride beneath the tree, and reach up their arms to him.

In this manner he succeeded in pulling them all up into the great tree.

"Now, send the animals away," he said, when he had landed them all safely. "They must not remain in the neighbourhood to betray us."

Wild Bird bowed, and spoke quickly and excitedly to the animals, in the Indian tongue. They pricked up their ears at the sound of her voice; then the pony she had

ridden gave a wild snort, and dashed on through the forest, followed by the others.

They had remained in the tree but a couple of hours, when the scout again manifested uneasiness.

CHAPTER XII

BREAKING THE CORDON

WILD BIRD was the first to notice it, and she touched him upon the arm.

"What is it that again disturbs the White Destroyer?" she asked, anxiously.

"Nuthin much, yet," he replied; "by-an'-by things may assume a more sart'in shape."

An hour passed, but there was no change. The woodland was just as solemn and silent as before; the birds chattered among the branches; the leaves dropped, dropped, dropped, at the touch of the breeze as it fanned through the forest.

Toward noon it stiffened up and blew with greater force, causing the autumn foliage to descend in showers.

Old Anaconda broke the deep silence now by a suggestive grunt, and sniffed the air like a foxhound.

"Ther devil's ter pay," he growled; "ther woods ar' afire, an' we've got ter cavort out o' this roost or git scorched; you hear ther old man talk!"

"Have Sitting Bull's braves done this cowardly work?" Wild Bird asked, her eyes flashing.

"Yas, I opine they hev, altho' et mayn't be ther same gang as ar' surroundin' us. Leasthow, thet fire ain't more'n a mile off, an' as it runs at the rate o' fifty miles a minnit through these dry leaves, ther sooner we make a grand scoot, ther better; you hear me!"

To think, with the Dwarf Destroyer, was to work. Taking off his belt, he lowered the girls to the ground by aid of it; then dropped lightly upon the leaves himself.

"Come!" he said, resolutely; "foller me, but don't ye dare ter make so much noise as a baby mouse. Ef strategy won't rescue us, knives and revolvers will, I reckon."

Presently a wave of Old Anaconda's hand caused the girls to pause, while he skulked on, knife in hand; for the shining blade of steel was the only weapon to use now, as reports of firearms would only serve to attract the attention of the foe.

Like some grim phantom the little old scout glided along, no sound of his disturbing the silence. Every footstep was noise-

less, his breath, even, was hushed—long-drawn.

In this way he crept on for perhaps an eighth of a mile, when he once more came to a halt, and stepped quickly behind a tree.

Just in time to escape observation, too, for an Indian came prowling along, glancing about him in a manner indicative that his suspicions had been aroused.

The eyes of the dwarf gleamed wickedly as he saw the unsuspecting brave approach, and he gripped his knife for its deadly work.

Nearer and nearer the red-skin came in an incautious shuffling gait, until he had fairly passed the tree where the dwarf scout was concealed. Then a human body suddenly shot into the air and descended upon the back of the red-skin, and a keen, flashing blade did its deadly work. In a moment, Old Anaconda tore off his scalp.

Resolved to know for certain if any more of the red devils blockaded the forest between him and liberty, he made a wider and deeper detour, but failed to find a foe. Satisfied on this score, he made his way back to where he had left the girls, and found them much alarmed at his protracted absence.

"You have killed an Indian," Milly Owen said, with a horrified glance at his belt.

"Yas; killed ther last of ther Mohicans, you bet! But look! yonder's a jet of flame! the fire is upon us! Come! we must put for our lives!"

And it was even so.

As they started to leave the spot, long tongues of fire followed spitefully in their wake, and dense clouds of choking smoke settled around them.

Sitting Bull was in the vicinity of Quinnebog with a part of his band, having detailed a number of his braves to worry and pursue the Dwarf Destroyer and his companions.

The great forest fire had swept far to the west now as the sun began to set, leaving in its track a desolate waste of scorched and naked timber, and frying carcasses of unfortunate beasts and birds that were caught in the fiery vortex.

In the edge of the timber that remained untouched by the fire, Sitting Bull and his handful of braves sat their horses like centaurs.

The Sioux chief was waiting for the white renegade, Watsanoka, previous to the proposed attack upon the Choppings.

But Watsanoka came not, and deep shadows once more began to gather in the forest, and the red-faced moon began to show her form up over the eastern horizon.

"Watsanoka is late!" Sitting Bull growled, at last. "The braves remain here while Sitting Bull go hunt him."

Threading his way through the silent woods, he soon came to the northern bank of Beaver Lake. Without pausing, however, he continued along the bank toward the cabin of the Magician of the North, where he arrived in due time, and drew rein before the door.

He dismounted and tried the door, and to his great surprise it swung open.

Before entering the cabin, the wily chief peered into it, to see that no trap had been set for him. But he could see nothing, and therefore stepped inside. Stirring the fire to a blaze, he proceeded to make an examination in general of the articles belonging to the magician.

Picking up a box which lay upon the floor, he raised the lid and gazed in. His curiosity was quite satisfied. A huge artificial snake lay in the bottom, and it instantly began to recoil and raise its horrible head.

With a yell the chief dropped the box, and left the cabin, in disgust.

On arriving upon the outside, the savage found that his horse was missing. Thinking he might have strayed he set out in search of him, and spent full an hour in the task without success.

At last he paused at the edge of a glade, in a great rage.

A low sound of laughter caused the chief to start and gaze about him in alarm.

Not a half-dozen yards distant the terrible object known as the Demon of the Forest was approaching rapidly, the short feet moving as fast as those of a larger person.

The chief saw the strange and horrible thing, and stood rooted to the spot as if entranced. He had often heard of the Demon, but had never before caught more than a passing glimpse of it.

Nearer and nearer it came, the mouth opened by a broad grin; the eyes winking and blinking, and the ears wiggling and flapping like those of a mule.

Poor Sitting Bull! If he had never had experience of affright before, he had a good taste of it now. His limbs refused to move, and he trembled in every joint. All he could do was stand and stare at the terrible shape, in a horrible fascination.

The Walking Head seemed to be aware of this fact, for it approached the red-man, and walked around and around him, until Sitting Bull suddenly awakened to the fact that his lower limbs were wound and bound by a series of strong cords.

Instantly after this discovery he gave a gasp and reached to his belt for his tomahawk, but it was not there! Nor was he possessed of any of his weapons.

He was now quickly jerked to the ground.

and his arms bound to his back, although he knew not how or by whom, as he lay prostrated upon his face.

When the tying was finished, he was rolled over on his back.

Then the Demon of the Forest waddled away again across the glade whence he had come.

Sitting Bull was alone in the forest, where beasts of prey were not scarce, and his chances were anything but tempting.

In the meantime, Casper Dayton, in his Indian disguise, had been prowling about in the vicinity of the Choppings, and had learned of the escape of Hal Dayton and Dave Laam, together with part of the press-gang who worked in the pen.

"Ten thousand curses upon their heads and souls!" the villain hissed, as he left the village and walked along the southern shore of the lake.

Searching along the lake he soon found a canoe, and springing into it, he pulled across to a point where he had made an appointment to meet the Sioux chief and his braves.

On stepping ashore and entering the forest, he found the red-skins, but not their commander.

"Where is the great chief, Sitting Bull?" he asked, addressing one of the savages whom he had heard called Foxfoot, and who had assumed command for the time being.

"The great chief went in search of Watsanoka and has not returned," was the reply.

"I am Watsanoka," Casper Dayton said, "and your chief bade me to give you orders when it pleased me."

"The ears of Sitting Bull's braves are open, and they will heed the words of Watsanoka," Foxfoot replied.

"Then let them visit the pale-face settlement on the banks of Beaver Lake, and begin the scalp-dance of death. Let not a man, woman, or child be spared; let the firebrand be applied to every cabin, except the building called 'the Pen.' Does Foxfoot understand?"

The savage responded with an "Ugh!" and turned and addressed his companions in the Indian tongue.

Casper Dayton awaited the result with a great deal of satisfaction, for he saw that the savages were eager and willing, and he smiled his pleasure as they filed away through the forest with drawn hatchets.

"I have won!" he said, distinctly and loud.

"No, Casper Dayton, you have lost!" exclaimed a voice, close behind him.

CHAPTER XIII

FACE TO FACE

THE speaker was the Forest Lily, Hazel Eye. She stood in the rear of Casper Dayton, a pistol in her hand, which covered the renegade.

He wheeled and saw it.

"Devils seize you!" he gasped. "Who are you, and whom do you think me to be?"

"The eyes of the Forest Lily are rarely at fault," Hazel Eye replied, calmly. "They can penetrate the disguises of even greater villains than you, Casper Dayton, with all your hideous paint."

"Curses on you! What do you mean, girl? I am not Casper Dayton, nor did I ever hear the name."

"You need not lie," the girl replied, as coolly as before. "Come! Casper Dayton or no Casper Dayton, you must accompany me. Resist, and I'll shoot you dead in your tracks!"

"You dare not do murder!" Dayton gasped, believing he could intimidate this brave fairy of the forest. "You dare not do murder!"

"Try me and see!" Hazel Eye said, full-cocking her revolver. "I give you until I count ten to decide whether you will go with me or not."

"The fiends take you. What are you going to do with me?" he demanded.

"Patience and time are two of the roadways to knowledge; perseverance another. If you wait long enough and have enough patience, you will doubtless learn as to the disposition of your remains."

After she had appropriated his weapons she gave the order: "Right about, face!" and they marched off through the forest, Casper Dayton in advance, covered by Hazel Eye's pistol.

In this way they marched until they came to the Magician's cabin on the lake shore.

The door was open, and the little old man sat upon the doorsteps, smoking his pipe in the moonlight which streamed down through an opening in the trees.

As Casper Dayton saw him he gave a violent start, and mechanically reached toward his belt; but Hazel Eye pushed him forward at the muzzle of her weapon until the villain stood in front of the Magician—stood there glaring down at him like a confined spirit of evil, worked into a frenzy.

"Sylvanus Dayton!" he gasped, his features working, his fingers opening and shutting convulsively. "Sylvester Dayton!—you—alive!"

"Ay! alive!" the Magician replied, as

he arose and stood upon the threshold. "Alive, my devilish brother, although it is not your fault that I am. Come, Hazel Eye, bring your prisoner within the cabin."

The old man ignited the wick of a large oil lamp, and the blaze glancing to a mirror-like reflector lighted the room in every part.

He then turned, with folded arms, to gaze at the man sitting on the stool under the cover of Hazel Eye's weapon.

"Yes, Casper, I am alive; but it is not thy fault," he repeated. "What brought you hither?"

"*Shall* I tell you?" the other replied, with a sneer. "Well, I will then. It was to murder the son of your brother, James. It was to murder him in cold blood, and take possession of our wealth at Brooksfield."

"Then, you knew nothing of my whereabouts?" the Magician asked.

"No; had I suspected that you were alive and in this region, you should have died, long ere this, I assure you. But, who is this accursed brazen-faced girl?"

"Take care, Casper Dayton, lest she be so angered as to shoot you. Listen to me and you shall hear that which will surprise you. The story you told to the counterfeiter, Canada Chet, was a base lie; let me now repeat a little of the truthful history of the Daytons, for the benefit of this young auditor.

"Some years ago, there lived three brothers and an old father, in an Eastern State. The old gentleman was well fixed, in this world's goods—his wealth counted up into the hundreds of thousands, and he had no heirs until these sons of his came. Then the old man watched them grow to manhood, and was content to die.

"Of the sons, James was the youngest, Casper the next in rank, and Sylvanus the eldest. Therefore the old father made Sylvanus his choice, contrary to the usual way, for the youngest son is generally the one best loved because the last.

"Sylvanus was an honest, hard working fellow, James was also industrious and inclined to be saving, but Casper was a wild, dissolute fellow, a spendthrift and at heart a villain.

"At last the good father died, and in the presence of the three brothers, the will was read.

"And such a bomb then exploded in the Dayton camp! The will was far from interesting or satisfactory to any of the brothers, except to Sylvanus, to whom the property was bequeathed, with the exception of two dollars, which was left to be divided between James and Casper.

"In case of the death of James first, he

was to have a decent burial. No provision of this kind was made for Casper. Should Sylvanus die first, the whole wealth descended to James; after his death, to Casper.

"Thus, there was a grand incentive to villainy, and one which you, Casper Dayton, made haste to embrace. I had never believed you capable of actual crime, but I found out to my cost that you were, for one night as I was coming along a gloomy highway, I was attacked by you, and knocked senseless from my horse. You then threw my body into the river, where you calculated I should die by drowning.

"Kind hands rescued me, however, and I was taken to the cottage of a widow, where I was restored to consciousness. But the terrible blow had unsettled my brain, and there followed a sort of insanity that was intermittent, however—not constant.

"At times I was of sound mind. Then would come on one of the strange spells in which I feared you—feared my God—feared everybody except the widow and her daughter, a baby then. To them I took kindly, for I believed them my friends.

"A strange, headless body was found in the river the next day, attired in the clothing of Sylvanus Dayton, and was taken and buried, and a large circle of mourning friends wept over the coffin of the supposed murdered owner of Brooksfield. But it was only the body of some unknown person who had been fished out of the river, and substituted, by my directions.

"Thus, Casper Dayton, you supposed you were rid of me, and you turned your attention to watching an opportunity to strike your remaining brother—the obstacle which stood between you and the heritage of Brooksfield.

"While I, seized with my insane fear of you and the world, fled the country. First, however, I married the Widow Walling, and took her and her child with me. I penetrated to the very depths of the wilderness, and finally came into this remote region, where I have since remained.

"My wife died, when Hazel Eye, here, was a mere child, and I have brought her up to suit myself. But all my life since you dealt me that cowardly blow, I have been possessed of those strange spells of fear. Lately they have come upon me less frequently, and you behold me now *not afraid of you, Casper Dayton!*"

"Ha! ha! we shall see about that, my crazy brother! I shall yet have my revenge upon you. What do you intend to do with me?"

"Nothing. I shall free you, and tell you to go, warning you to keep your distance

from this cabin, which is so constructed that death lurks within every timber. Go! I say, and may the spirits of Almighty God release you from your doom in the coming hell. Show him out, Hazel Eye."

Hazel Eye nodded, and motioned Casper Dayton toward the door with her revolver.

He arose hastily to depart, glad at the opportunity to thus get off, but on the threshold he paused.

Hazel Eye arose and closed the door after him; then turned toward the Magician.

"Why did you let him go? He's a bold bad man, and he will not hesitate to do you an injury."

"I fear him not now, as I used to; I have shaken off the insanity that has been the cloud of my life, and I am prepared to fight odds with science and strategy. I did not touch him, because he is my brother, and I would have no man's blood upon my hands. But I have warned him to keep away from my cabin; if he comes now, his blood be on his own head."

"What would you do?"

"Blow the cabin to atoms. I have every timber so charged with various explosives, that I can arrange it that when I leave the cabin and close the door, no one can thereafter open that door without blowing up the whole building. It is an infernal invention, but I have warned them; and those who would not die, must heed the warning."

"But tell me, am I the child of the widow whom you married years ago?"

"The same. I am your step-father, instead of your grandfather, as you have always called me. I have ever regarded you as my own child, and loved you as such."

"But if I am in no way related to you, it is not right for me to live upon your bounty."

"Tut! tut! child; banish any such ideas, for you are as dear to me and as much my daughter as though you were in reality a child of my own blood. But, now, this can no longer be your home. I have decided to quit this wilderness, if I can, and return to Brookfield, my old home. But, ere I go, there is work for me to do in the forest; and, too, I would not be far away when this cabin blows up. Therefore, take your necessary trappings and your horse, and go to the cabin of the Dwarf Destroyer, where I will join you later. Be careful not to fall into the power of the red-men, with whom the forest swarms."

"You need not fear," Hazel Eye replied. "I have never yet been taken an Indian's captive, and I do not believe my luck has deserted me."

Ten minutes later, both the Magician and Hazel Eye had quitted the cabin.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CABIN FORTRESS

WE must now return to Old Anaconda and the girls, whom we left fleeing before the flame and smoke of the burning forest.

It is unnecessary to add that they ran for dear life, for such was the case. The lurid tongues, driven by the wind and the flame current, chased them with the hissing perseverance of a snake; the smoke blinded and choked them, but still they kept on, struggling bravely.

At last Old Anaconda uttered a cry of satisfaction, for they had arrived at the edge of the large clearing wherein stood his cabin or "fort," as he often called it. It was a large structure of logs, with a single door, and windows up near the eaves. It was built in the most serviceable manner, and was a good retreat wherein to keep off the red-skins, for loopholes covered the wall in nearly all points of the compass, so that approach from any side of the clearing was well guarded.

On the edge of the clearing Old Anaconda and his charges paused, while he gazed sharply toward the cabin.

"What is it?" Wild Bird asked, noticing the sudden compression of his lips. "Does the White Destroyer scent danger again, near his cabin?"

"Waal, I 'low there's sumthin' gone wrong, 'twixt you an' me. Thar's sumbody, Injun or white galoot, gone an' taken persession o' my domycile yander, sure's I'm a reflexion uv ther Darwin theory."

"Who is it?"

"Durn me ef I know, though I'll allow they're white, for no Injun 'd be werry likely ter start a smoke, not if they war layin' low fur me."

"Then let us hurry forward and get out of danger," Milly Owen said, eagerly.

"Not yet, by a long shot! I opine I'm a-goin' ter know more afore I stick my pericranium inter a hornets' nest. Fu'st uv all, I'm goin' ter l'arn how thick ther Injuns be hayrabouts."

And enjoining the girls to remain where they were, the scout moved away along the border of the clearing to make his reconnaissance.

In about ten minutes he returned, and glanced uneasily toward the cabin.

"We've got to git out o' this," he said; "fur thar's a hull pack o' red hellions out hayr in the forest, a-sneakin' up in our rear. We must make fer my leetle fort yander, an' if we git a blizzard frum concealed enemies,

I opine it won't be our fault. I'd rather an Injun'd skulp me any time than a white, but—— Come erlong!"

Seizing each other's hands, the three girls followed swiftly after the old scout, across the clearing toward the cabin. The distance was not great, and they were soon within a few yards of the cabin when Old Anaconda gave vent to an overjoyed whoop, as the cabin door swung open, and a crowd of men stood upon the threshold to welcome the fugitives.

At the same time the savages burst from the forest at a point the fugitives had just quitted, with wild yells of baffled defeat.

In the meantime Old Anaconda and the girls reached and entered the cabin in safety, after which the door was closed and barred, and they could well bid defiance to their foes, for the time being.

Explanations ensued, and the union of the whites in that cabin in the wilderness was one of decided joy.

The occupants of the cabin ahead of Old Anaconda and the girls were the fugitives from the Choppings, among them Dave, Hal, Harry and old Alex. Watchman. On their arrival at the cabin, they had found it occupied by no less an individual than the redoubtable Amasa Scroggs of Kalamazoo.

Out of the dwarf's wardrobe they had found enough clothing to cover their nakedness, so that they were comfortably installed by the time of the arrival of Old Anaconda and his trio.

The dwarf's larder was never unstocked; consequently dinner was first in requisition.

The getting up of this was left to the culinary skill of Milly Owen, Rachel and Wild Bird, while the men kept a vigilant watch from the loopholes on either side and end of the cabin.

The dinner prepared by the three girls was soon served, and proved liberal and satisfactory to the hungry ones in the wilderness.

The afternoon passed away, but there was no hostile movement on the part of the savages on the edge of the forest.

The afternoon gave place to the oncoming night. The change of wind had swept the forest fire to the north, and the sun went down over a horizon that was smoky and dim.

The moon rose above the forest of trees like a ball of fire coming out of a bloody bath, and shone down into the clearing brightly, revealing each object as clear as day from the cabin.

"Now, look sharp. If you see any object in the grass of a suspicious nature, let it have it, kerslap!" Anaconda ordered.

A second later the keen eyes of the dwarf

caught sight of a tuft in the tall grass that grew in the clearing, and he uttered a grunt.

Thrusting his rifle into a loophole, he took a quick, accurate aim and fired. Then he withdrew his rifle and peered out into the moonlight.

The veteran Destroyer had not missed his guess in the least, for that suspicious tuft was now lively enough, and an Indian death-yell pealed out shrilly upon the quiet of the night.

About an hour later those in the cabin felt the building shake and tremble, as if jarred by an earthquake, and a roar that sounded like the explosion of a thousand cannons.

"What in thunder's ther meaning of that?" Old Anaconda grunted, peering out. But nothing could be seen to excite suspicion.

Had he been in the vicinity of the home of Sylvanus Dayton, the Magician, but a few minutes before, he would have found the cabin surrounded by yelling red-skins, headed by the white villain, Casper Dayton.

"He is in there, curse him!" the renegade cried. "Go, open the door, you pack of yelling idiots!"

But the savages were shy of the cabin, and could not be persuaded to touch a timber of what they believed to belong to the Evil One.

"Curse you all for a pack of coyotes!" Casper Dayton cried. "Stop your infernal screeching, while I order the man inside to surrender!"

The Indians quieted down, and then the white renegade advanced and knocked on the door.

"Come! open up, if you don't want the cabin torn over your head, Sylvanus Dayton! No delay now!" he ordered.

But there came no answer. Within all was dark, and silent as a tomb.

Again did the renegade pound, and call aloud. Still no answer.

The savages had crowded back at a respectful distance, and were watching with their hands on their scalping-knives expecting each moment that a horde of imps infernal would rush out upon them.

"Curse the luck! I'll break open the door, and kill him myself!" the infuriated scoundrel cried, and seizing a heavy rock, he hurled it with all his strength against the door.

The door burst open with a crash!

At the same instant there was a blinding flash; then a tremendous report—a terrific explosion that rent the cabin into thousands of atoms—tossing great timbers into the air—blowing up trees, and creating a horrible havoc.

Eight of the savages escaped uninjured; the rest, including Casper Dayton, were torn and mangled and their remains scattered in every direction!

CHAPTER XV

RED-HOT ARROWS

THOSE within the cabin of Old Anaconda were puzzled to account for the explosion, and opinions differed—that of the old scout being that Indians had been fooling about the cabin of the Magician, and had, unwillingly, caused the explosion by tampering with some of the old man's secrets of defence.

The Indians on the edge of the clearing seemed startled, and were seen retreating into the woods.

The night dragged by, the moon arose to zenith, and began to dip toward the west. Still there was no attack—no sight of the Indians.

"Isn't it a little queer about their keeping shady so long?" Hal Dayton asked, anxiously.

"Yas, I opine thar is thet same," the Dwarf Destroyer replied. "But we ain't agoin' ter be kept much longer in waitin'. Thar i—what'd I tell ye."

He pointed toward the eastern timber belt from which a figure had emerged, and was rapidly crossing the clearing toward the cabin.

"It's Hazel Eye, the Forest Lily," the Destroyer said. "I wonder what brings her here?"

"Hazel Eye is a beacon of warning," Wild Bird said. "She always appears when there is danger, and leaves when danger is over."

"Waal, now, ef them ain't facts, when I come to think about it, I don't want a cent," Anaconda said, earnestly. "Some one open the door and let the gal in."

She entered the cabin, and was warmly received by Anaconda, Wild Bird and Kitty Owen.

After the first greetings were exchanged, Hazel Eye glanced around the cabin, and nodded her head commendingly, as she saw that every person except Rachel Connors was armed, and had positioned themselves at a convenient loophole.

"It is well," she said, turning to Anaconda, "for you'll need every gun and arm you have to defend yourselves from merciless butchery. The woods are full of savages, who are creeping toward the edge of the glade on its every approach."

"Let 'em come, we ain't a-goin' ter take no slack from them, I'll allow, ef we aire little," the dwarf scout said, with a grin. "By the way, gal, what war thet explosion a while ago?"

"It was the blow-up of the Magician's cabin, on Beaver Lake. A white renegade and a number of Indians were killed."

Rachel Connors started forward, eagerly.

"His name! his name!" she gasped, her form trembling and features working. "Was it Canada Chet?"

"No, Mrs. Connors, it was not. This man's name was Casper Dayton. But, I have to advise you, that the ruffian, Canada Chet, was massacred, together with every person in Quinnebog, during the forepart of this night!"

Before Hazel Eye had finished speaking, there was a sharp scream, and the outlaw's wife fell to the floor, as all supposed, in a swoon; but when they picked her up, they found that her heart had ceased to beat, and she was dead.

The attention of all was presently called to the eastward by Old Anaconda.

A fire had suddenly been kindled at the edge of the timber, around which several forms could be seen busied.

"Thet settles et. We're goin' ter hev the cabin fired over our heads. But we must sarcumvent sum of them red ripscallions' plans, though," Old Anaconda said. "You, young man, whose handle is Dave Laam, mount up inter ther loft, whar you'll find a trap openin' out on the roof. When ye hear me screech, you open ther trap, climb out on ther roof, an' pull out the burnin' iron, sling it away, an' get back in under kiver lively, lest ye git plugged in the back."

To Harry Reynolds he said, "You stand by ther door, an' ef an arrer strikes inter wood below ther eaves, et'll be yer duty ter knock it out wi' yer gun, and skedaddle back into the cabin like Hellen Blazes."

The occupants of the cabin selected loopholes at both sides and ends of the cabin, so as to guard the approach on all sides, for it was suspected that the forest on every side of the clearing was swarming with Indians.

Old Anaconda directed his attention to the east for the time being, leaving Wild Bird to the west, Hal to the north, and Hazel Eye to the south, with the remainder of the company equally divided in the different locations.

The first arrow from the east shot out of the edge of the timber like a rocket, and soared upward like a star. But the air had cooled the steel, and it was seen coming on its journey only for the space of a few seconds.

All watched with interest the flight of the next arrow. Soon it was seen to soar up out of the edge of the forest, and then they lost sight of it.

An instant later there was an audible thud against the side of the cabin.

"Now's your time!" Anaconda yelled. Harry Reynolds darted out of the cabin, and with a heavy stick reached and dislodged the arrow which had already commenced to burn a hole in the wood.

He barely had time to get back into the cabin ere a perfect shower of arrows shot out from the forest on their fiery mission. Another and still another volley; then a wild, fierce war-cry wrung upon the night.

"Hellen Blazes! Git ready, fer ther varmints ar' a-cumin'! Look out fer ther arrers, boys, an' we'll cover ye if we can!"

Harry Reynolds was out of the cabin by the time the arrows had struck using his cudgel against such as were below the eaves, with a vigour that proved he was born of heroic stuff. When he had finished his part of the dangerous job, he glanced upon the roof, and perceived that it was literally stuck full of arrows.

Dave was working bravely, but the fire was gaining headway, seeing which Harry dashed into the cabin, and up on to the roof, to assist in tearing out the fiery barbs.

In the meantime the red devils were swarming toward the cabin from all sides, howling and yelling the best they knew how, as they came, believing that an easy victory was guaranteed them.

Crack! bang! went the weapons in sharp concert, answered by fierce Indian yells and death-cries; crack! bang! crack! bang! Would the incessant rattle never stop?

They were fighting for life and liberty, were these confined pale-faces, and bravely, determinedly, too. Every bullet counted a death in the Indian ranks; the volleys caused them to waver; then they came on again, howling and yelling like mad!

Dave Laam had left the burning roof, carrying the senseless form of Harry Reynolds in his arms.

And the arrows were not all out.

The cabin is surely doomed!

CHAPTER XVI

CONCLUSION

"It's no use stayin' up thar," he gasped, dropping Reynolds on the floor. "We're both riddled with bullets, and Harry here, I guess, is dead."

Hazel Eye uttered a scream of anguish, and ran forward to kneel at the side of the unconscious lad. She placed her hand upon his heart—then gave an exultant exclamation.

"He lives—he lives, for his heart still beats!"

While Hazel Eye and Kitty Owen, devoted their attention to caring for wounded Harry and Dave, the others were keeping up a steady fire upon the advancing enemy. For Old Anaconda's little "fort" was well supplied with ammunition, and the rifle-barrels grew hot as the hurricane of bullets continued to fly.

But, fire as rapidly as they might they could not keep the swarms of red demons back, and it was only a matter of a few minutes when the cabin was completely surrounded by the howling horde. And as they kept below the range of the loopholes there was no chance for our band of fugitives to score a point.

What then remained.

Death stared them in the face—death in one of its most horrible phases.

Death by fire, or by surrendering to the tender mercies of the scalping-knife. These were the only two alternatives.

Old Anaconda gazed around into the faces of those within the cabin. Each face was a shade paler than usual, although begrimed with powder and smoke.

Harry Reynolds had recovered consciousness, and after having a bullet extracted from his shoulder, he was able to stand alone. Dave Laam had also been relieved of several leaden messengers, but was very weak.

The Dwarf Destroyer gave vent to a stifled curse, as he listened to the triumphant howls of the red hellions on the outside.

They were making no attack, for they knew that the burning cabin must soon rout out the concealed pale-faces.

With a grim nod of his head Old Anaconda ascended into the loft, and took a peep out of the man-hole onto the roof.

One glance satisfied him.

The whole roof was in one blinding blaze—burning rapidly, fanned by a stiff breeze which had sprung up, and came bowling down from the north.

He returned to the ground floor, and once more glanced into the faces of his men. Alarm was expressed there, but they were yet resolute and determined to fight to the death.

"What was to be done?" old Alex. Watchman demanded, in his quiet manner. "Stay here and stare death face to face, or make a dash?"

"Neither. Listen. By all that's glorious *help is coming!*" cried Hal Dayton, as the echo of a horn came faintly to their ears.

"God be praised then, for it is true!" Old Anaconda cried, leaping to a loophole and peering out toward the east. "Yonder comes a cavalcade of mounted Manitoba volunteers to our succour."

The savages made the discovery about the same time as those inside the burning cabin, and advancing abreast, in military style, prepared to open fire upon the horsemen as soon as they came within range.

But, forgetful of the rear, they made an advance just far enough to expose their persons to the loopholes' range.

Anaconda had been watching for this, and took advantage of it.

Every loophole on the eastern side of the cabin was manned, and at a given signal a volley of leaden death poured into the line of savages, mowing them down like grass before a scythe.

At the same time there was a toot of a bugle, and the mounted police charged forward, with speaking rifles.

What could be the result? There was but a single alternative—flight.

With howls of defeat the savages scattered in every direction, and fled at the top of their speed.

While Old Anaconda flung open the door, and the besieged pioneers—if so they might be called—all escaped into the open air just a moment before the roof of the burning cabin fell in with a crash.

The volunteers then rode up in triumph, and a gladsome welcome they received.

Among them was James Dayton, the father of Hal, who, coming in search of his son, had enlisted the Manitobans in his service, together with a squad of picked scouts, and it turned out that they arrived upon the scene just in the nick of time.

The defeat of the savages was so great that they fled from the neighbourhood, not offering further molestation.

Preparations were made for an early departure from the region.

Horses were found in the forest belonging to the Indians, and appropriated, so that each person had a mount.

They were ready to leave the vicinity of the burning cabin, when a queer object was seen crossing the clearing, and the mysterious Demon of the Forest soon stood close at hand.

Not long, however, for the huge grotesque head was seen to part in the back, and out rolled a human body, doubled up like a ball. This unfolded, and in a moment more Sylvanus Dayton, the Magician, stood upon his feet, and the Demon of the Forest was no more! The whole secret of the Demon, amounted to the fact that Dayton was one of those "boneless" wonders of the human race, and was able to roll himself into a ball, and get inside the Walking Head, which was manufactured out of buffalo hide, with artificial eyes and ears.

These he worked from the inside by the aid of his hands.

Another reunion took place between the two long-separated brothers, which we have not space to relate in detail, then the whole party bade adieu to the wilds of the Northwest, first, however, interring the body of Rachel Connors, near Old Anaconda's cabin.

The Daytons are now in Ottawa, and an equal division of the wealth between James and Sylvanus placed them for ever above pecuniary want.

Hazel Eye lives with her step-father, and at no distant day will probably become the wife of Harry Reynolds, while Kitty Owens, as the adopted daughter of James Dayton, will no doubt in time wed Happy Hal.

Old Anaconda has wedded Wild Bird, and they live happily together in the Northwest. Two trappers stop with them, occasionally, in the persons of Dave Laam and Alex. Watchman. The rest of those who escaped; from the Pen dispersed their various ways.

THE END

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